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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 39th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 18 February 2010

Jeudi 18 février 2010



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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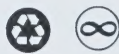
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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 18 February 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 18 février 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Sikh prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 17, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act / Projet de loi 236, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to spend a couple of minutes to talk about Bill 236, and I just wanted to reaffirm what this act really does, if passed.

I know we've heard over and over again that we need to do more, and this is sort of the first phase. We need to do more. I think that sometimes—not in a selfish way—we need to do more with members of this House. Nevertheless, I think the folks out there are more important at this stage.

What does this bill actually propose to do? It provides for the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate reorganizations while protecting benefits security for plan members and pensioners. Obviously, that's very, very important, because in the last few years we've seen enormous amounts of restructuring, and the workforce is sometimes the last one to be dealt with.

It will clarify the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs and eliminate partial windups. Of course, in the last couple of years we've seen an enormous amount of that.

It will increase transparency and access to information for plan members and pensioners. It will enhance regulatory oversight that, once again, we learned in the last couple of years is needed more and more. Once again, what was in place for the last number of years, previous to the last pension reform, is not good enough for today's economy and standards.

We'll improve plan administration and reduce compliance costs. Once again, that's a big piece of making

sure these plans will stay in effect and help those mostly affected, especially under the circumstances of windup or restructuring.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Questions and comments? Response?

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the comments of the member from Northumberland—Quinte West. I did have an opportunity yesterday to speak at length about Bill 236. As I mentioned in my speech, the government has said they are going to bring forward two pension bills. This is the first, and the people I have met with describe it as kind of tinkering around the edges. The more difficult challenges to do with pensions are going to come in the second bill, which we're expecting sometime this spring.

This bill is dealing with the more minor issues; some, though, that are very important. I know that the member from Simcoe—Grey has brought up issues that he sees are favourably dealt with in the bill. I did make mention yesterday in my speech that my concern is that the grow-in provisions are becoming unique to Ontario. I note, in reviewing the pre-budget consultation notes, that Advocis, one group that came forward, pointed out that harmonizing provincial and federal regulations for defined contribution plans is something to be looking toward.

Ontario would be the only jurisdiction in Canada, other than Nova Scotia, that would have grow-in provisions. In Nova Scotia, they've been advised to do away with grow-in provisions. I'm hearing from the people who are involved with pensions that this would be a bad thing, that we should obviously have harmonized rules across the country, and that having Ontario unique and having grow-in provisions only in Ontario—something that makes the plans more expensive—would be a step backward. That is my major concern with this bill, which, as I mentioned, is highly technical and deals with the easier parts of pension reform.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: First of all, I would like to start by saying that I listened intently to the member from Pickering—Scarborough East's delivery yesterday of the government's plan for Bill 236, and I must say that it was a really good history lesson. He had a lot of information about what has transpired over the years. But I guess I have a different outlook on this situation, speaking from my experience as a lobbyist in Ottawa for the steelworkers.

I remember being there a few years ago; we had brought forth concerns about the Bankruptcy and Insol-

vency Act, which also interacts with provincial pension laws, so they're married, so to speak—you can't talk about one without the other. While I was in Ottawa, we met with great frustration from the sitting government, as well as the official opposition at the time. We had trouble even getting in to see them to talk about the situation of pensions and the decline of pensions in Ontario, and Canada for that matter.

Some of the members wouldn't even meet with us, and I remember a particular member from Alberta, Conservative member Mr. Ted Menzies, who is now the pension lead for the federal government. In fact, not only would he not see us; he wouldn't even talk to us at the time. I find it quite interesting that he's the lead for the Conservatives on pension reform.

0910

I'd also like to talk about the demise of pension plans in Canada and of defined pension plans, which have been under attack for years. They've been underfunded for years. Nobody did anything at the time. We set off the alarm bells years ago, and now everything has come to fruition. I find that most governments are reactive, not proactive, and that's what is happening here again.

I'd like to talk about the situation of the elderly in the country. Elderly people are suffering. I don't know who in this room could live on a \$600 old-age—

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'm having trouble hearing myself—and with the other \$500 it comes to about \$1,300 that a person has to live on in this country. That doesn't cut it. A lot of our elderly people are being forced into homes that they wouldn't want to be in, or into situations where they can't—especially if the spouse dies, that cuts their income in half and they're struggling. Then it becomes a burden to their families as to themselves. These are the people that built this country, paid their taxes all their life, and at the end of their life they're almost being penalized because they're older and can't survive in the situation. Obviously something had to be done quickly, and I'm not sure it happened fast enough.

In reference to the Nortel situation, the Nortel people really were very proactive and demonstrated it in Ottawa on the Hill, brought their concerns forward and were speaking out loudly. With that amount of people involved, they finally got the ear of the government a little bit, as well as of Ontario, I see. Now the Minister of Finance has decided that they may come up with a plan to supplement them up to \$1,000, even though the plan that exists in Ontario—the guaranteed pension investment fund—already says that, even though it's grossly underfunded. They're going to give them up to \$1,000. That, frankly, doesn't cut it. Some of these people are entitled to \$3,000 or \$3,500 a month for their 30 or 40 years of service, and they're going to be cut down to probably a third or less than a third of what they're entitled to. I don't know if this is a temporary fix or if it is a political move, but it certainly does not fix the situation for the Nortel workers. In fact, in my humble opinion, it's an insult to them.

Getting on with that, I'd like to say that we, the NDP, are in support of increasing CPP. Also, we'd like to see an increase to the old age security, which has been there for years and is grossly inadequate, to allow people to have some dignity in their retirement.

I'd like to get into the specifics of the bill and our position now, after getting that off my chest, the frustration that I've faced for years in Ottawa and here. I do recall that when I first got elected I was fortunate enough in the draw to get the first bill; that was two and a half years ago. When I got that, the first thing I did was try to help workers with severance and holiday pay, which they were being ripped off on all over this country and all over this province. Of course, it's still on the books. It died—the government decided not to entertain it—and here we are two and a half years later and everybody's running around with their heads cut off because people are getting ripped off all over the country with pensions and severance pay and all that. It's just on and on. Every week we hear about a new company or a new group of people that are in trouble financially. Now all of a sudden, everybody has come out of the woodwork all concerned about this. It's amazing how these things happen.

I'd like to start on the bill itself with something from the Arthurs report. I think it nicely sets the stage for my remarks: "Ontario's system of occupational pensions—like ... systems in the United Kingdom and the United States—has been encountering difficulties"—that's putting it mildly—"especially during the present decade," with the demise of the markets and the demise of overall national incomes.

"The percentage of the Ontario workforce covered by occupational pension plans has been slowly declining, from just under 40% of the workforce in 1985 to just under 35% today.

"Increasing numbers of workers with pension coverage—but still less than one in five—are now enrolled in defined contribution ... plans rather than defined benefit ... plans, though the latter"—defined benefit plans—"are often seen as more attractive by workers.

"Many pension plans have failed in recent years, and many have been severely underfunded for extended periods for various reasons: financial difficulties encountered by sponsoring companies feeling the effects of global competition; declining long-term interest rates, equity prices and plan asset values; increasing numbers of retired members relative to the number of active members still contributing to their plan; and the rising cost of providing pensions to a workforce whose life expectancy has been increasing.

"The reconfiguration of pension plans triggered by the restructuring of Ontario's economy, as well as their actual or threatened failure, has given rise to considerable litigation.

"Other critical concerns include the rules governing the funding of plans; the ownership of surplus in plans when they are ongoing, wound up or reconfigured; and the protection of worker interests when sponsoring employers do not or cannot make good any deficiency in plan funding.

"Attempts to resolve these concerns by changes to Ontario's pension laws have faltered, either because they have been politically controversial or because they require legislation that only the federal government can constitutionally enact.

"These difficulties have also revealed shortcomings in the legal and regulatory framework governing pensions, in the agency responsible for pension regulation in Ontario, and in the architecture of plan governance.

"The cumulative effect of these difficulties has been to shake the confidence of employers, unions, workers, pension professionals and policy analysts in the future of the occupational—workplace—"pension system in general, and especially in defined benefit pensions."

Before I get into the details of the bill, I'd like to talk about what the NDP will be looking for in terms of pension reform over the coming months.

First, with only 35% of Ontarians covered by an occupational pension plan, there is a clear need for expanded pension coverage for all working Ontarians. Ideally, the way this would be done would be to increase the benefit levels of the Canada pension plan. This would draw on existing economies of scale, risk-sharing and administrative efficiencies in the plan.

The Ontario NDP joins with the federal NDP and the Canadian Labour Congress in the campaign for an expanded national universal pension plan in the form of enhanced CPP. That said, the issue of expanding pension coverage is an urgent one. We in the Ontario NDP do not believe that the Harper government is going to move to expand coverage to a suitable level. Therefore, we believe there is an important role to be played by the provincial government in greatly expanding workplace pension coverage.

The Ontario retirement plan is the next topic. The NDP believes that Ontario should move ahead, as are other provinces, and develop an employment-based pension plan for all working Ontarians who presently lack occupational coverage. The NDP has proposed just such a plan. We are calling our plan the Ontario retirement plan. Before I get into the specifics of how such a plan would work, I'd like to talk a bit about the benefits of the Ontario retirement plan.

First, and most obviously, the Ontario retirement plan would deal with the roughly 65% of Ontarians who presently have no workplace-based pension coverage.

Second, in an Ontario retirement plan, the band of income that the contribution rate would be assessed against would be different from that of the current CPP. A broader band of income would allow for a higher benefit for plan members earning over \$47,000. This responds to exactly the kind of replacement-rate issues that the pension expert Bob Baldwin identified in his report to the Minister of Finance, which was tabled in Whitehorse in December 2009.

Third, an Ontario retirement plan would be used to further the consolidation of a fragmented workplace-based pension plan and system. For example, Ontario has over 6,500 workplace plans. Many of them are very

small. Many of these might elect to integrate into a large Ontario plan which has as its base two thirds of the Ontario workforce.

Fourth, an Ontario retirement plan could allow for the transfer of an RRSP which could be used to purchase past service credits for the basic benefits. This would allow older workers who would not ordinarily be able to earn the full benefit to receive more than they otherwise would.

An Ontario retirement plan would be a publicly run, targeted benefit plan, much like the Ontario teachers' plan, the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan and the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Pension Plan. In order to maximize participation, every employee not enrolled in a workplace pension plan would be automatically enrolled in the Ontario retirement plan. But the plan is not mandatory. If you have a better way to plan for your retirement, you don't have to take part in the Ontario retirement plan. If, as your life changes, you decide that the Ontario plan is something you can use, you can opt back in.

0920

Employees and employers would be expected to contribute equally to the plan. Contribution rates for employees should be phased in over a five-year period. Depending upon economic circumstances, a somewhat longer phase-in might be required for employers. Unlike a defined contribution plan or a group RRSP, the assets of the plan would be invested for the plan as a whole, not on an individual basis. The result is far more security for plan members.

The maximum benefit would be between \$600 and \$700 a month in 2010 dollars. Now, that amount may not seem like a lot to people, but I'll tell you that that \$600 to \$700 a month could be the difference between an elderly person being forced out of their home; that \$600 or \$700 could pay for their hydro and utility bills and maybe even some food, and the rest of their meagre income could be used for their everyday needs. I think that \$700 a month would make a big difference to a lot of people in my riding, considering that 20% of them are living below the poverty level.

Because many current members of the workforce would not have sufficient years in the plan to receive the maximum benefit, plan members would be able to increase their normal benefit through a retroactive purchase of past service credits. In the new world of work, people are increasingly mobile. Many will work a number of jobs in their lifetime. We can choose to let them sink or swim, or we can step in with sensible solutions like the NDP Ontario retirement plan that will make their lives better. So that's the coverage issue.

But Harry Arthurs also came up with a number of good suggestions regarding strengthening the existing pension system. First, the NDP supports the Arthurs recommendation for establishing an Ontario pension agency. We believe that pooling, administering, investing and disbursing stranded pensions would be an important role for this agency. In our opinion, an Ontario pension agency

would pretty much solve the problem that Nortel pensioners face. Nortel, AbitibiBowater and Canwest Global Communications could all benefit from an Ontario pension agency.

This agency would be able to take stranded pensions and treat them like an ongoing, active pension. Rather than winding up the plan, the agency would be very proactive, endeavouring to grow the plan to ensure a monthly pension closer to what a retiree expected before the plan became stranded or abandoned. I believe Quebec did that, and it's been very successful. Maybe—just maybe—we should follow suit.

Second, the \$1,000 of monthly pension benefits eligible for protection by the pension benefits guarantee fund is completely inadequate. We believe that over time, the monthly guarantee covered by the PBGF should be increased to a maximum of \$2,500, to reflect the effect of inflation on the original maximum of \$1,000, which has been in place since 1980. I believe Mr. Arthurs recommended this to the government in his plan. After our discussions with him—we had a meeting with him, and we in the NDP suggested that \$2,500 would be a good mark, and it sounds like he took our advice. I wish the government would do that, but I haven't heard anything about increasing the PBGF to \$2,500. In fact, that's not even mentioned. This is probably the main thing that would solve some of the problems of people in Ontario.

Pensioners and people who have lost their pensions, people who are going to lose their pensions and people's pension funds that are underfunded—it will not give them adequate money for what they've worked their life for. These are deferred wages that were negotiated by a lot of these people in contracts. Also, people without unions were hoping that this would cover them, and it didn't. Now they're saying, "Sorry, you're out of luck. The best we can do is up to \$1,000."

So if a person was entitled to \$3,500, that he worked for all his life and that the company put into the pension plan for him, thinking full well that he was going to get that at the end of his life, what happened? They pulled the rug out from underneath all these people. A lot of these companies have left the country: "Sorry, we don't have enough money to put in the fund. Sorry about your luck." Now you're 70 or 75 years old, and a steady income that has allowed you to stay in your home, take the odd trip, and buy gifts for your kids and grandkids has been removed.

While the NDP agrees that the basis on which the levy will be paid by plan sponsors is a complex matter and that a phase-in period may be necessary, we are extremely disappointed that this key Arthurs recommendation is nowhere to be seen in the first package of pension reform in this legislation.

Third, the NDP believes the existing grow-in rights that provide access to early retirement benefits for all qualifying single-employer pension plan members in the event of a full or partial windup should be extended to all such members who are involuntarily terminated. Qualifying members should continue to be those whose age and

years of service add up to 55. We believe that it would increase equity and reduce the number of disputes about full or partial windups. I know there has been some progress on the grow-in rights issue in this package, but we also have some concerns about how it's being implemented in Bill 236.

Speaker, we should get somebody to turn down the heat in this place; it's like a sauna in here.

Fourth, the NDP supports the Arthurs recommendation that all active plan members should be immediately vested for all accrued pension benefits. As you know, as things now stand, if an employee moves on before two years is up, he or she loses their employer contribution to their pension plan. This is something we should have changed years ago, and we are glad that the government is finally putting this in as part of the present package they are offering.

But we also have real concerns with the package. I'm really looking forward to the public hearings on this very technical bill. Here are some of the NDP's initial concerns:

We are very concerned with the changes in surplus distribution on windups. This change in the act is a significant loss of entitlement for plan members. Currently, section 79 requires both, and there has been agreement for surplus distribution and that the employer entitlement to surplus must be established. We acknowledge that there has been difficulty in the application of this section of the act, but we still believe this wording makes things much, much worse. There would have been a greater basis for this change if the government had followed the Arthurs recommendation on vesting and grow-in rights, and if the PBGF recommendation for an increase of \$2,500 a month were implemented. Only the vesting and grow-in recommendations were implemented in this bill; the PBGF recommendation was totally ignored. This is not the delicate balance Harry Arthurs wanted. Putting it bluntly, the NDP believes that the surplus should only go to employers on windup if the employer has clear entitlement to the surplus. That has been another question over the years that has cropped up. We will oppose this provision as things stand now.

The NDP also has some problems regarding the transfer provisions. Transfer between plans needs to be made as simple and transparent as possible. The basic principle of preservation of benefits and commuted value is necessary to ensure fairness and impartiality. Individual choice needs to be preserved in this bill.

There are a number of problems with the way asset transfers are addressed in the act currently. Most significantly, current provisions require the predecessor and successor plans to provide the same benefits, and individuals are not given any choice with respect to their transfers. As a matter of principle, the legislation should incorporate individual choice as reciprocal agreements do now, so that plan members can make a decision, based on full information, to stay in the original plan or move on to the successor plan. The proposed changes to the act remove the requirement that benefits be identical. How-

ever, individual members still have no choice with respect to transfers.

In addition, in the private sector, the interest of the original employer in an asset transfer for past service is questionable. In the public sector, large, independently administered plans generally deal with voluntary transfers under a major Ontario pension plans reciprocal agreement that requires no employer expenditure of time or resources. We believe that this reciprocal agreement provides a better model for transfers in the public sector than the proposed agreements between the original and successor employers.

0930

Last summer, I toured Ontario to ask the people what they needed in pension reform. The result of these consultations is the NDP's Ontario retirement plan. That is what Ontarians told us they need. They also told us that the PBGF is outdated and needs to reflect the current financial situation of pensioners.

There are some useful sections of this bill, but it is a technical bill. It doesn't address the major concerns of Ontario pensioners, nor does it provide the security that our future pensioners need.

I encourage the government to take our suggestions under careful consideration and make the necessary amendments to this legislation to provide the best protection for people from Ontario. We also encourage you to implement the NDP's Ontario retirement plan now so that 65% of Ontarians can look forward to a decent, livable retirement.

I don't have a lot of faith in the fact that the federal government is going to give us all the answers we require. There have been some pie-in-the-sky requests—doubling the CPP, doing these things. I have a strong feeling that that won't be doubled. If it is, it will take many, many years before that happens. It'll be a slow implementation. Every little bit helps—I won't argue that—but we need an Ontario pension plan to supplement the CPP, to supplement old age, so that people in this province are not punished because they live longer, are not punished because they had contributed their whole life to the tax system in this province. They had, with honour, negotiated contracts which would provide them, from their employer, with the proper money instead of taking raises at the time, instead of taking money up front. They negotiated the deferred wages. It went to their pension so that their pension would be there for them when they retired.

As we all know, as we get older, things start going wrong. You start getting medical problems. You start getting financial problems because you haven't had a raise or you don't have the ability to get a raise because you're on a fixed income.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker: I've travelled my constituency. I can't speak for other members. In reference to the condition some of these elderly people are living in, frankly, it's a disgrace. Some of these people worked their whole lives and are eating peanut butter, are living in, I would say, less-than-good conditions as far as—they

can't even afford furniture. They can't afford cleaning services. They're struggling. Some of them are crippled. Some of them are unable to take care of themselves. The hygiene is questionable at best in a lot of cases. This is totally unacceptable. In this province, with this much wealth, in this country, our elderly and our pensioners deserve better, much better.

I think that this Ontario plan would provide them with some—it wouldn't solve all the problems, but it would definitely improve their lives to a point where they might be able to stay in their residence with a little dignity, a little bit of comfort, and not have to rely on their grandkids to help them out, because that's not what they intended. They intended to help their grandparents and their parents stand up for themselves, and their grandparents provided them with the education and taught them the ways so that they could move on and not have to worry about them when they're starting their own families. Well, that's not the case.

A lot of elderly people are, not by their own wish, being forced to move in with their grandkids or their kids because they can't afford to stay on their own. It's a shame. People in this province have worked long and hard to build some kind of security for themselves, and they have to be forced with these kinds of conditions. I see it all the time. I see it every day—people coming into my office. How do I explain—even a young mother coming in with two kids, with nowhere to go, nowhere to live and can't feed her kids.

Then I see a government spending \$1.5 million or \$2 million a day on consultants on one file—the e-file—\$388 million on one file. If we take the 20 agencies that they want to have accountability for, the major ones—WSIB and all the other ones that they want to have a forensic audit for—I think this would be a fair estimate—I'm sure you're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars, maybe billions of dollars, that have gone out for consultants in the last few years—hundreds of millions; billions.

I'll tell you what I could do with that in Hamilton. I'll tell you what I could do for the people of Ontario. I could tell you that I wouldn't be laying off nurses. I'll tell you: The health system and education system would be in better shape—not perfect, but better shape. It's amazing—amazing—that the Ontario government has direct or indirect control over 368 agencies or municipalities in this province—368. So they're going to investigate 20. They're going to investigate 20 agencies out of 368. So if you found \$388 million of questionable spending and not a lot of bang for your buck on one agency called eHealth, if you take the other 19 major ones, I think that'll add up to quite a considerable amount. But if you take the other 340 agencies and municipalities in this province that are controlled by the Ontario government, I think you're going to see that it's going to be mind-boggling. Actually, it'll make Bernie Madoff look like an amateur. It really does. I think he was \$50 billion. I don't even want to think about it. I'm sure it'll unfold over the next few years, all the waste of money.

But getting back to my original statement, how do I explain to a mother with two kids who comes into my office with nowhere to live, who can't put food on the table and can't get a job? What do I tell these people when they read in the paper about all the shenanigans that go on and the waste of money? No wonder some people have a poor attitude toward politicians. I can see it. I can see it. I guess I'm a little naive to come here and think that—when I first got here, the Premier stood up in the House and said, “All the new members, welcome to Queen's Park. We're going to work together to better the lives of the people of Ontario.”

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: He meant that.

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, I've had real trouble understanding that statement, because I know for one thing he sure doesn't work with me on committees. I'm sure he doesn't work with our party. He doesn't work with the opposition.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I heard you got invited to the Super Bowl party.

Mr. Paul Miller: Oh, yeah, I wish.

All I know is that you can stand up and put on the show for the public, but when the gloves come off, you're nowhere. You're out of the ring; you're out of the arena. So don't tell me that line. Don't stand up here and say these kinds of things in front of the people of Ontario. Because I want them to know, if they realized what goes on, there'd be a lot of unhappy Ontarians—and they probably are already. I really cannot believe what goes on. My eyes have been opened, and I have trouble sleeping now because of what I see goes on. If I've got bags under my eyes, you'll know why. It's really unbelievable, what goes on.

I guess I could go on and on about my unhappiness as to what goes on in this House and what goes on at committee level. I could go on forever. When I first got here, my Bill 6, which was to help people who were losing their severance, losing their holiday pay and losing all this—I was fortunate enough. I guess it was like a lottery: You get to pick your order on the order paper. I got number 1 and I was thrilled. I came into the House and I actually thought Mr. McGuinty, when he stood up, meant what he said, because it passed second reading. That's good for the people of Ontario. They all stood up and everybody was happy, I thought, and my party was congratulating me and saying, “Yay. Good job, Paul. You got that past second reading. We've never been able to do that.” I said, “That's good.” Well, guess what? It fell. It fell at committee. All the Liberals voted against it. It fell. The Conservatives and the NDP voted for it. It fell dead—dead in the water. It's still sitting there. I said, “You might as well just put that bill in the washroom.” It's absolutely ridiculous.

0940

They talk a good game, but when it comes to actually doing something, they wait till the roof's caving in or there are 3,000 people in front of this building yelling at them before they'll do anything. And when they finally do it? “Oh, we're great. We're wonderful. We thought of

this all by ourselves.” Nonsense, absolute nonsense. They don't listen to any good suggestions from the opposition or the third party, they just do whatever they want, and when they get there, they claim victory and how wonderful they are. Well, people, I'll tell you, the blinds should be taken off by the people of Ontario to really see what goes on and who's being productive and who's doing their homework, because it isn't them.

I'll end now—I could have gone on forever about this—but I think it says a lot. Once again, I challenge the government to listen to some good advice from the opposition and the third party, from people who just might have some good ideas to add to this pension reform. But most likely, they will do whatever they want and not listen, and we'll find ourselves in another pickle in about three years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I appreciate the comments from the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek—he's always entertaining—but I appreciate also the amount of passion he brings to this file and this bill in particular. The background that he brought concerning his discussions with the federal government—I understand his frustration on that.

I've had the opportunity over the past year, since I was elected, to meet a number of seniors' groups. I've talked to seniors' groups in Fenelon Falls, Omeme and, most recently, in the hamlet of Glen Alda in the northeast corner of my riding. They've all expressed concerns about pensions, about living and going forward as we go through the next few years.

We know that our seniors population is growing—a number of us are approaching that ourselves and will be entering that area—and the concern about pensions is great. I know the current global downturn has had a significant impact on Ontario families and businesses. The government has been taking very proactive steps to ensure that when the economy returns, we will be well-positioned to lead the rest of the world in recovery.

We've provided support for low-income seniors, doubled the property tax support. We've been working on PST rebates, which will kick in this summer, and the tax cuts are coming forward. But that's why we've introduced the Pension Benefits Amendment Act. It is to get protection for our seniors. They've spent their whole lives getting to the point where they deserve to have a secure retirement, and I believe that this bill moves a lot towards getting there.

I'm very pleased that we're participating in the broader national discussion about improving the Canada retirement income system in this regard. I know that Minister Duncan, with his provincial counterparts, recently attended in Whitehorse to deal with this national problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek on Bill 236, the first of the govern-

ment's pension bills. I know he referred to the Arthurs report quite a bit in his comments. He talked a bit about the NDP plan to create a sort of supplemental pension system. Just briefly speaking about that, I would say, ideally, a supplemental system should be national, not provincial. I know the NDP plan is kind of modeled after what's happening in the UK, the system that's been created by the Personal Accounts Delivery Authority, which is called NEST, which stands for National Employment Savings Trust. That is in the UK, a national program. So ideally, I think that is a better solution. I don't necessarily think it needs to be government-run.

I do like the idea of auto-enrolment, and I note there are others, including the Association of Canadian Pension Management, who support having auto-enrolment. In fact, they say expanding coverage should be job number one, getting more coverage for more people. Expanding coverage basically means getting more people involved with direct contribution plans. One way to do that is to have auto-enrolment systems. You could have an auto-enrolment system—I know that in the United States, they've brought about changes nationally to encourage more participation in defined contribution pensions and retirement savings. They've done it on a national basis there.

Many of the changes necessary are or should be national. As was mentioned at the outset, this bill is tinkering around the edges with some of the minor changes involved in pension legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was a pleasure to listen to my colleague's comment on Bill 236, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act.

I think there is no doubt in anybody's mind that our elder years need to be well-protected. We need to be able to guarantee to the seniors of this province that they will be able to retire with dignity and with respect. The best way to do this is to have a defined benefit pension plan.

I can tell you that right now in my riding, there is a seven-month-old strike. One of the main issues of why all those more than 3,000 workers are on strike is they want to protect their defined benefit pension plan. The company, Vale Inco, has offered to change to a defined contribution. It is one of the three main issues that are keeping those more than 3,000 people on strike.

Because we've had a defined benefit pension plan for years in Sudbury, there is an entire generation—I would even say there are two generations of workers in Sudbury who are able to retire with dignity and respect. My 89-year-old father-in-law is an Inco retiree. He gets his little pension cheque. It's not a whole lot because he retired many, many years ago, but it gives them the certainty. They know that this little cheque is coming every month. They can plan, they moved into an apartment they can afford, and they do things that they're able to afford because they have the certainty of this. That gives them peace of mind. That gives them happiness. This is something that is worth protecting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I'm delighted to be able to participate in this debate this morning. This debate of the pension act has been an issue that I've been looking at for many years, ever since I got elected here at Queen's Park.

Let me tell you, I can't believe those people could live on the seniors' pension plan. Even though today there are a lot of people who have a pension plan, there's no protection for them, like we see happening at the present time with Nortel and with different companies. Even with the car industry at the present time, there are some doubts there.

Let me tell you, way back in the mid-1920s, only a few companies and the public sector had this coverage or this protection of the employees. Today we only have about 30% of workers who are covered with a pension plan. Those who paid toward a pension plan who do not have protection—I say "protection" definitely, because we know what's going on.

But the McGuinty government said in March 2009 that we will take care of this, and we are. That's exactly what we are doing today. We want to protect our employees, we want to protect our employers, and the government of Ontario has a major role to play in this bill. This is why today, the McGuinty government will introduce a temporary solvency funding relief program to protect jobs and families.

We have worked to simplify pension division when a marriage ends. We have initiated the first-ever actuarial study to examine the future of the pension benefits guarantee fund.

This is, again, a very good bill and I hope the three parties will support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has up to two minutes for his response.

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Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the members for their comments, and I'm quite pleased they went rather easy on me after my outburst, which was warranted, but it must be "Be nice to members week."

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's Kindness Week; that's right. I appreciate the kindness of the members.

However, I must say that the member from Gengarry—Prescott—Russell made a point that back in the 1920s there were few pension plans, and in the 1940s, when unions were formed and things started happening, they started getting defined pension plans. That was a good thing. But it shouldn't take 80 years to set up a pension plan for Ontarians. They should have done it after World War II. Maybe they should have started thinking about protecting pension plans instead of waiting until the economy falls apart, waiting until there's 5,000 people standing in front of Queen's Park or waiting until all the companies are leaving Canada and Ontario, and the erosion of our base industries—I could go on

forever about the decline. To talk about history is okay, I guess, for information, but it does absolutely nothing to fix this situation.

If you look at this bill, there is absolutely no money attached to this bill—zero. It's technical and administrative changes. Sure, there's accountability in there, but not a cent is going towards the PGB fund. If you want real results, if you want to really help the people and pensioners in Ontario, don't talk about flair and administrative changes and say, "We care," and "We feel for you." Let's get the cheques out there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is good to be back in the Legislature, and as my lovely other half was saying to me as I was going back, "I'm sure you'll enjoy being around your playmates again."

I'd just like to begin by congratulating a truly outstanding member of this Legislature on a new position: my colleague from Peterborough, who is the new government whip. He is one of the hardest-working and most effective members of this Legislature. It's awfully hard not to be a Peterborough Petes fan when Jeff Leal is sitting near you.

My colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek referred to, and let's use his words, "an outburst." You get to know your colleagues sometimes in different ways. My colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is one of my defencemen when we play hockey. This is a hard-working guy who came up the hard way, and when he talks about retirement, like many of us in the Legislature, he's looking at retirement and thinking, "Those days are now a lot closer to me than my 40s were," and you think to yourself: "What exactly have we done?"

He asked a rhetorical question, and wondered why after World War II we hadn't thought of protecting pension plans. That gave me cause to think as he was saying those words because it occurs to me that in the time I was growing up, you'd be sitting there, in the 1960s and even the early 1970s, and you'd be reading your newspaper and there would be somebody's obituary with a picture of him or her and a listing of their life's accomplishments, and it would say, "So-and-so passed away on such-and-such a date surrounded by friends and family. He lived to the ripe old age of 72." And that wasn't uncommon. Yet today, the baby boom generation, of which I'm one, begins to turn 65 next year. That's an interesting thing to think about. The biggest demographic bulge in North American history is just going to begin to hit retirement age, or what used to be considered retirement age, next year, in 2011. And I'm sure there's a lot of people out there who are looking at that and thinking to themselves, "My goodness. That's me."

As we move into retirement, as that big demographic bulge begins to drop out of the workforce, we're looking at an age in and around the middle of the century in which for every retired person there'll only be about one person in the workforce. That tells us, as legislators, that it's very important for us to do our work properly, be-

cause it's the work we do here that's going to determine whether or not the men and women who have worked hard, who have taken the torch passed to them by the generation that fought the second of the great wars of the 20th century and have built the peace—when we retire, do we intend to be a burden on the generation that comes behind us? Clearly, we don't. And very clearly, for those of us who are in good health and active as we move through our 50s, our late 50s, our early 60s—we're in much better shape than people were a generation and two generations ago. We're going to live longer. That makes it incumbent on us in government to make provisions for our seniors and those who will become our seniors, to ensure that we have a chance to live a life in comfort and dignity and to do it by being responsible from the vantage point of how we set aside our own money and what our government does with our tax money.

That's a lot of the impetus behind this bill. This is a bill that does something that—I think I can ascribe the quote to the first American President, George Washington, who said, "If I had four hours to chop down a cherry tree, I'd probably spend the first two or three hours sharpening my axe." That is part of what is going on in this bill here.

What the bill says is that we're going to take the time and the process to do this job correctly. What we don't want to have to do is engage in a knee-jerk reaction or panic, because at this point we don't have to panic, but we are going to get it right. At this juncture of time, we're going to act with the best knowledge that we have and the best thinking that we have and lay the foundation for a long-term, sustainable, responsible means of providing for the men and women who are retired now and those who will retire in the generation to come. We have to do that in the light of a global economic downturn which, in one way or another, has governed almost everything that our government and other provincial governments and the federal government have done for most of the last two years.

That's the impetus behind this act, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act. It implements long-term reforms to strengthen the pension system for Ontarians and, most importantly, to increase Ontario's competitiveness.

If one looks at other jurisdictions, you think to yourself, "Okay, western Canada: What drives the economy? Natural resources." What's our natural resource in Ontario? Agreed, we have forest resources, we have rich minerals in our ground, but our real, true natural resource here in the province of Ontario is the people who live here. When companies come here and set up high-value jobs, they're looking for raw materials, not in the ground, not in the Great Lakes, not in our forests. They are looking for them in our secondary institutions; they're looking for them in our universities. So what we do to ensure that good-quality people come here, work here and stay here governs the degree to which we're going to prosper here in Ontario. That's part of what this Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2009, aims to achieve.

What are the principles behind it?

The easiest one is transparency, ensuring that mechanisms are in place for stakeholder feedback and also for posting proposed regulatory changes. You've got to know what's coming up, and that's one of the things this Pension Benefits Amendment Act is going to implement.

Another is balance. We've got to consider both benefit security and also plan affordability. We can't have one without the other, and I think just about everybody will look at it and agree with that.

There has to be co-operation. We've got to collaborate productively between our federal and provincial partners. I believe my good friend and colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka said, and I'll use his own words, that many of the changes should be national, and that's true. Each and every province is going to have to work with our federal government, and that is regardless of who is running the show in any province or who is in power at the federal level, because we're looking at a series of measures that are going to be implemented over a fairly extensive period of time. So we've got to co-operate, and co-operate productively, among the provinces and with the federal government.

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That includes harmonizing our rules with other jurisdictions wherever possible so that if you decide for whatever reason that, after a career spent working in Ontario, you're going to live in Victoria or retire in Atlantic Canada, you shouldn't have to go there and find that all of the things that you did are done completely differently in another jurisdiction. Harmonizing those rules is something that ensures that, as a Canadian, if you pack up and move to another region in Ontario or another province in Canada, your pension and its benefits will still make sense and still apply to you there. That's one of the things that this legislation does.

Another is clarity. One of the things that any pension benefit proposal needs is clear, user-friendly rules. Let's give the insurance industry, whom we love to beat up on in this particular Legislature, a little bit of credit in recent years for trying to rewrite a lot of their policies in clear, simple, understandable English. For those companies that do it, good on you. For those that don't, look at the best practices of your competitors. If, as a consumer, I'm looking at two comparatively equal pension agreements, and I can read and understand one, and I can't the other, I'm probably going to go with the one that I can read and understand.

Another is going to be coverage. One of the things that my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek touched upon—and I think it's a very good point—is that we've got to ensure we expand pension coverage for Ontarians. The benefits should strive to be universal, strive to be fair and strive to apply to everyone everywhere in Ontario. That's going to be one of the objectives of this legislation and how we go about applying it in the workforce.

Another is going to be competitiveness. In the long run, Ontario companies have to grasp that, just like anywhere else in the world, the people who work for them, their greatest asset, are not pieces of machinery that they

can put on the junk pile after they leave. Their responsibility is to treat the human beings who dedicate their careers to working for them with dignity after they've left. Similarly, our companies have to remain competitive in world markets, in the way that they provide for their people and in the way that they maintain their cost structures in a global world where you can buy just about anything, anytime, anywhere at something like a comparable price.

Finally, one of the principles guiding this legislation is going to be flexibility. We know what happened yesterday. We know what happened in decades past. We can probably take a fairly decent guess at what's going to happen in the next year and the next two years, but we're not sure what's going to happen in the next five years or the next decade or what the world is going to look like in the 2020s, the 2030s and beyond. One of the things in designing legislation today that's still going to be in force decades from now is ensuring that it's flexible. That's one of the principal goals of the Pension Benefits Amendment Act.

Since March 2009, Ontario has actually taken a number of very important steps to modernize our employment pension system. In the some of the time remaining to me, I'd just like to quickly cover a few of those.

The province introduced a temporary solvency funding relief program, which is designed to protect jobs and families. The overriding concern that Ontario has as we emerge from this particular recession is jobs. This is a measure that does protect jobs.

The province also worked to simplify pension division when a marriage ends. "Till death do us part," is what we pledge at the moment of marriage. God willing, many and most of us will in fact live out those vows, but things happen. When a marriage does end, one of the goals of this legislation and legislation passed by the province last year has got to be the simplification of pension division.

Ontario initiated the first ever actuarial study to examine the future of the pension benefits guarantee fund. This is a very important measure, because the pension benefits guarantee fund hadn't been properly funded, and the actuarial study had to look at what is necessary to ensure that the pension benefits guarantee fund, which is the rainy-day fund if a pension should end up in peril through circumstances that certainly no one foresaw at the time that the pension got going and people were contributing to it—how do we deal with a pension that has gotten into trouble? That's a very important part, and that actually got under way last year.

The province has also established an advisory council on pensions and retirement income. We need to know, to the limit of our ability to foresee the future, what people need in the future. What is their future likely to look like? How will society, technology and other jurisdictions evolve forward so that the legislation that we craft here is to the limit of our ability as legislators—because I'm not speaking in partisan terms here; this is something that all three parties are trying to get right and trying to make work for all 13 million of us, who are all one extended

Ontario family when it comes to looking after one another in our elderly years.

Finally, Ontario is participating in a broader national discussion about improving Canada's retirement income system. This has been something that our Premier has pushed very hard for in the Council of the Federation, which are the meetings of provincial Premiers. In this regard, our Minister of Finance recently met with his provincial counterparts in Whitehorse, where they had some productive discussions about the future of pensions for all Canadians. We plan to continue these discussions this summer.

On that note, I think I'll wind it up for today. I thank you very much for the time to discuss something that's very important to me, to the generation of my parents and to my entire baby-boom generation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the speech from the member from Mississauga—Streetsville on the pension bill, Bill 236.

In his speech, he talked about the concern with—I don't know his exact words, but the burden on future generations, on our kids or grandchildren. I would say to the member that rich public sector pensions are a concern for being a burden for future generations. However, also, the \$25-billion deficit that this government is facing right now is a very obvious burden on future generations. The fact that the McGuinty government is on pace to double the debt of the province of Ontario by 2012 is a very clear burden on future generations in this province. It's something that the government has not tackled satisfactorily to this point.

Another point: When we look at the public sector pensions—I think I'll refer to my comments yesterday—one of the experts talked about public sector pensions where 34% of wages are going towards the value of that pension and how that is not balanced with the fact that those people who don't have these defined benefit pension plans can only put 18% of their wages toward an RRSP. It's just not a balanced situation right now, and that's something that needs to be rectified.

It's not necessarily a provincial responsibility. It would involve changing the tax laws, perhaps, instead of just 18% of pay for those trying to contribute to an RRSP or other system, allowing no limit, but a lifetime limit on what you can put towards your retirement income.

There is a lot that needs to happen in pensions. As I've mentioned previously, quite a bit of it is at the national level. I'm still concerned about the unique features that make us unique in Ontario, so we aren't having a harmonized system, particularly the grow-in part of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga—Streetsville for his kind words on our hockey prowess. He made some good points about doing it right and taking your time to do it right. I think that's important also because this is a major undertaking in the

last—well, I guess in the last 30 or 40 years, nothing has been done to improve the situation, like the governments taking a good, hard look at pensions throughout Ontario, and Canada, for that matter.

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Once again, if you can do window dressing and say that we're going to tighten up the rules, we're going to tighten up the regulations, we're going to tighten up the accountability, that's good; that's all good stuff. But I get very frustrated about the financial aspect of it, and as the member from Parry Sound pointed out, with a \$25-billion or \$26-billion deficit, it's difficult to commit funds to the pension guarantee fund. That could create a problem, and the only answer, the real answer to the people's dilemma in this province, is financial restitution. That's the only way to solve their problems out there in the real world. You can talk about a perfect scenario, you can talk about improving a situation from an administrative point of view, but as we all know, money talks and you know what else happens. So until you actually are committing to improve the fund that exists now or to create a new Ontario pension plan, I don't really think the results that you're going to get are going to be sufficient.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very pleased to be commenting on the comments made by the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

I've been hearing this debate and the speech earlier from the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and the member from Mississauga—Streetsville, and I heard comments yesterday as well on this very important issue. Clearly, pensions are a very complicated issue, and I think the complexity of the issue is even more highlighted because of the economic downturn. That theme has come up a few times, and a point I made yesterday when participating in this debate—and I think it's still very much valid—was that what we need to do in Canada is take a national approach to this issue. We need to have a bigger dialogue as to the future of pensions, both in the public pension system and the private pension system in Canada. I don't think any one province really can accomplish much. It would result in a piecemeal solution, maybe short term in scope, and what we really need to do, moving forward—we owe it to our seniors, we owe it to my generation and the future generation—is to come up with ideas and plans which are national in scope. That's why it's extremely important that all provinces, including the federal government, sit down together and look at the issues around pensions.

We have Canadians who have pension plans, but we have a majority of Canadians who don't have a pension plan. We need to make sure that we have a system in place which covers both, not to mention that we have to look at the affordability of the system as well. It's important to talk about pensions, how they should be defined and how they should operate and work; it's a whole different thing as to how we are going to pay for them.

That issue is even more highlighted in today's economic circumstances, and we cannot forget that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to take part in the debate this morning on pension reform and to comment on the speech that the member from Mississauga–Streetsville delivered a few minutes ago.

One thing he mentioned—and the radar went up quickly when he talked about how we didn't want the government or our generation of people to be a burden on our children and our grandchildren. I just immediately thought of the \$25-billion deficit, and that's last year's deficit. In the current year, we're looking at a new budget sometime, I believe, in March. It will be very interesting to see what the projected deficit is for this year. If it's \$25 billion this year, you know that it's going to be at least \$22 billion, \$23 billion, \$24 billion next year. So by the end of this term, we'll likely have accumulated another \$75 or \$80 billion onto the provincial debt, and you think that's not going to be a burden on our children and grandchildren?

I think that debt is even more important than pension reform. I would love to see governments actually come and deliver balanced budgets. I know this government went completely crazy when they took over in 2003, and they found that after a summer of SARS, the blackout and mad cow—all those sorts of things were happening—that there was actually a deficit at that time. They made it out to be \$5.6 billion. However, they went crazy over that. Now they've made Bob Rae look like an economic genius because he had an \$11-billion deficit, and now we're at \$25 billion and counting. Good God, what's going to happen to this province if we keep going down this path of mismanagement?

Those were my comments on pension reform, but I would be happy to take part in the 20-minute rotation later on and speak a little more on debt and pension reform.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Mississauga–Streetsville has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaking to the comments by two of those who provided comments to me, the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka and the member for Simcoe North, both of them slammed public sector pensions. Let's remind them that in the last days of a Premier that I very much admired, Bill Davis—whom I get to see in Brampton every now and then—the Ontario public service had 105,000 employees. Today it's 65,000, and that number is headed for 62,000. We, in Ontario, have the lowest per capita number of public servants anywhere in the country, and I don't think that we're going to be throwing out public sector employees any more than our government plans to throw out private sector employees in a panicked attempt to balance a budget, because we have a plan. We have a plan that's going to create some 600,000 new jobs, that is going to attract \$47-billion worth of new investment, \$7 billion of which has already

walked into the province, and raise average annual incomes by something like 8.8%. We're going to work that plan because it's the right plan for Ontario and it's the plan that has been justifiably called Ontario-friendly. That's going to be the key to Ontario to continue to thrive and prosper in the years that come.

To my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, I'll say much the same thing: A deficit that was brought about by a global economic financial collapse that began outside Ontario is not going to end by what we do or don't do in Ontario. That's not going to cause Ontario to panic and to abandon our seniors, because this is a good plan and it's a good forward-looking plan. I think my colleague from Ottawa Centre has the right solution when he says we should take a national approach to pension reform. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being past 10:15 of the clock, this House stands in recess until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to introduce Ellard Beaven, father of Amy Beaven, who is here as a page, and all the way up from Timmins to watch his daughter today.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome Paul Di Ianni in the members' gallery, who is an OLIP intern in my office. Welcome.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to take the opportunity, on behalf of page Matthew Kostuch from Dr. Roberta Bondar Public School in Ajax, to welcome his father, Jim Kostuch, and his grandfather, Mitch Kostuch, who are watching from the public gallery today.

Mr. David Zimmer: I'd like to introduce John Jansen, who is the health and safety inspector for district 12 of the Toronto secondary teachers' bargaining unit and a constituent in Willowdale. Welcome, John.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. What test do you apply when you override decisions of bureaucrats and political appointees at LHINs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll refer this to the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I actually want to return to a question that was asked yesterday regarding Barry Monaghan and the drive-by smear by the Leader of the Opposition. I think it's important for members of this House to actually know the truth.

Before taking on the position of the CEO of the Toronto Central LHIN, Mr. Monaghan was the president and CEO of West Park Healthcare Centre for 18 years. Before that, he was the CEO of the Orthopaedic and Arthritic Hospital for five years. He was the chair of the pediatric Cardiac Care Network of Ontario and is also a past chair of the Ontario stroke strategy. Under the Conservative government, Mr. Monaghan served as chair of the Cardiac Care Network for seven years.

The member opposite dismissed him as a Liberal friend. We did a donation search, and the only time—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just remind the honourable member that it's important to—stop the clock, please. The question that was asked pertained to an issue that was asked today and not answering a question from yesterday. So I would ask the member to deal with the question that is asked as of today.

Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: In January, the Premier said that bureaucrats at the Niagara LHIN advised him to close the emergency rooms at Fort Erie and Port Colborne. During the Toronto Centre by-election, Minister Matthews said that Grace hospital's future lies with the LHIN, but just a day later, the Premier showed he'll interfere when it's politically convenient. He swooped in to help the member from Winnipeg by handing out \$15 million to Grace hospital on the day before voting began in the by-election.

Premier, why didn't you step in to save the emergency services at Fort Erie and Port Colborne?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just remind the honourable member that we refer to members by their riding names—and riding names here in the province of Ontario.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the question is about LHINs, so let me just complete on Barry Monaghan. We did a search. You referred to him—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just reminded the honourable member that she's answering a question that was asked yesterday in this chamber. I would like the minister to deal with the question that is asked within the chamber today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When it comes to Toronto Grace hospital, I can assure you that we have always supported the services at Toronto Grace hospital. They provide an extraordinary and very special service for people, some of whom are quite vulnerable.

It seems to me that actually all parties agreed that the services should remain at the Grace. I was very pleased to meet with members of the Salvation Army and talk to them about how we could continue to provide services at the Grace. It is a very special place. It needs a little bit of help, and I think all parties agreed that it was the right thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: No one would question the merits of supporting the Grace hospital. Of course we all

recognize that they provide exemplary service. But the Premier's defence of Courtyard contracts and exorbitant bureaucrat salaries at the LHINs shows he's not about to give up the farce that LHINs operate at arm's length.

Two days ago, you said that these LHINs are an effort to ensure that decisions about health investments are being made by the local community. But the vice-chair of Grace hospital gets it. He was quoted as saying, "Thank God for by-elections." Even the minister admitted to the media on the night of the by-election that your office responded to political pressure. So why did you take \$15 million away from Fort Erie and Port Colborne and hand it to the member from Toronto Centre's by-election campaign?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Not one hospital has been closed under our watch. And trust me, we would not have started with Toronto Grace, because of its very special place in the health care that is provided here. I deeply regret that the NDP candidate in that by-election chose to make a political issue of it, created a phony issue. The patients at the hospital, the staff at the hospital, the family members, had to deal with anxiety that was a complete fabrication of the NDP candidate.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. On Boxing Day, Reilly Anzovino was in a car accident. Despite the heroic efforts of first responders, Reilly died before she even reached the Welland Hospital, even though the Fort Erie and Port Colborne hospitals were closer. In 2008, your government closed emergency room services at Fort Erie and Port Colborne. Premier, do you regret that decision?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The first thing I want to do, of course, is express condolences to the family. As a mother, I cannot imagine the loss they are feeling, and I sincerely express that sympathy to them.

We are building a health care system in Ontario where every person in Ontario has access to the very best possible care as close to home as possible. Having said that, the reality is that sometimes people will have to travel to another community to be able to access the highly specialized care that is part of today's health care system. I think people understand that we cannot provide highly specialized care in every community hospital. When it comes to emergency care, it's vitally important, absolutely essential, that people get to where that specialized care is available as quickly as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: In 2008, the McGuinty Liberals directed the Niagara LHIN to cut \$50 million in services. This resulted in the closure of emergency services in Fort Erie and Port Colborne. The Liberal member for Niagara Falls believes this decision had an impact on this tragedy.

Reilly's father, Tim Anzovino, grew up with our leader. He and Reilly's mother asked us to call on you for

a coroner's inquest into their daughter's death. Will you respect their wishes and ask the coroner to examine whether the closure of the emergency room departments in Fort Erie and Port Colborne played a role in this tragedy?

1040

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite understands that calling an inquest is not a decision that is made by members of government. It's a decision made by the coroner.

I do want to emphasize that in the case of trauma, it is absolutely essential that the victim gets to the best possible place as quickly as possible, without stopping first at a hospital that is not able to provide the care that's required in that emergency.

We asked Dr. Jack Kitts of the Ottawa Hospital to take a look at the situation in Niagara. I've read his report carefully and I would urge members of the opposition to do the same. It's a very thoughtful report on why the changes are the right changes.

I'm going to quote from Dr. Kitts: "Critically ill patients would best be served by direct transport to a definitive treatment centre."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: What adds to this tragedy is that after the Premier ordered the LHIN to cut \$15 million, he handed \$15 million to the Toronto Central LHIN the day before the by-election began.

This is a tragedy that even a member of your own caucus believes resulted from the decision to close emergency services in the region.

The Premier used to call for coroners' inquests on a regular basis when he was in opposition. He has ducked responsibility in this chamber with respect to this question today by deflecting it to the Minister of Health. But it's time to start asking yourselves the tough questions. Will you start leading the call for a coroner's inquest into the death of Reilly Anzovino?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have actually ended the political influence when it comes to coroners' reports, and that's the way it should be.

What I can tell the member opposite is that we will co-operate in every way possible if the coroner chooses to investigate. The Niagara Health System has made the same offer.

I think it's important that the member opposite understands that all of us want to understand what happened in this situation. We do leave it to the coroner to make the professional judgment on an inquest.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Premier insists that his short-sighted cuts to front-line health services haven't impacted patient care. I'd just like to ask him if he would like to take a little time this morning to once again repeat that claim.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is nothing if not consistent—and wrong—on this particular

issue. She continues to maintain that we have made cuts to our health care system and to hospitals in particular. That is absolutely wrong. It is without foundation in fact. Every single year, we have increased funding for health care generally and hospitals specifically. During the course of the past six years, it's gone up some 42%. We think that it's significant. We think it is important. We think it's in keeping with the priorities and the values of the people of Ontario.

Again, in the upcoming budget, notwithstanding our difficult economic circumstances, we will find a way to once again invest still more money in our treasured and precious health care system.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to take this opportunity to read the Premier a letter that I received recently from a Hamilton man whose surgery had been cancelled:

"Although it is not necessary to correct a life-threatening situation, [my operation] is necessary for the condition to be treated ... before it progresses to a point where more invasive or aggressive treatments are required...."

"Why have we been paying more to the Ontario government by way of the 'Ontario health premium' only to have less service than ever before?"

It's a good question. Will the Premier answer it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: First of all, I want to sympathize with the individual involved and all of our families that are affected by illness and disease and looking to get treated at the earliest possible opportunity.

But I do want to correct the record. The fact is that we have, for the first time, measured wait times and we can now demonstrate that our wait times are actually getting shorter.

We have more nurses and doctors, and more Ontarians who have now become attached to or have access to a family doctor. We're exploring new opportunities—the first of its kind in North America, for example, when it comes to having nurse-practitioner-led clinics. And we're funding more drugs than ever before.

So I think, by any objective measure, we continue to do more for health care in order to do more for Ontario families, and they are benefiting from the progress we're making together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: While the Premier insists that patients aren't affected, patients continue to disagree, and hospitals are siding with patients.

In their response, Hamilton Health Sciences wrote: "Even though we're recognized as one of the most efficient hospitals in the province, we have been forced to make some changes that will impact patient care.... In 2010-11, we will do 1,200 fewer surgical procedures."

Why does the Premier insist that patient care isn't affected when hospitals state, and I quote again, "We have been forced to make some changes that ... impact patient care"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm glad that my colleague corrected herself, and I understand that the hospitals are, in fact, making some changes. Hospitals are required to make changes on an ongoing basis as they adjust to patient demand and other things that influence their activities.

Something else I want to say that I didn't mention before, insofar as the progress that we're making together with Ontarians: We have in place now these new family health teams. I think we have 150. We're going all the way up to 200. There is a network of nine family health teams in Hamilton, consisting of more than 130 doctors who have hired more than 100 new health care professionals serving almost a quarter-million Hamiltonians, including more than 8,000 who previously did not have a family doctor.

There is always more work to be done, but, again, any objective assessment will tell you that we continue to make progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, 1,200 fewer surgical procedures certainly is nothing for this government to brag about, but nonetheless, back to the Premier.

The Premier continues to claim that patients are not being affected, but we keep hearing from patients who are. Marita Devries, a cancer patient in London, may lose the cancer care nurses who provide her support: "Until your own family is touched by cancer, you do not understand how valuable these dedicated professionals are to the health care system."

This patient says she is being affected. Is she wrong?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate that my honourable colleague is going to want to raise individual cases. That's probably fairly within her responsibilities. I can't speak to the individual cases, but I can speak to you about the general progress that we make, and I want to talk just a little bit about wait times.

Angiographies down by 63%—that's 35 days; angioplasties down 14 days; cataract surgery wait times reduced by 208 days; hip replacements in Ontario down by 195 days; knee replacements down by 263 days; CT scans down by 39 days; cancer surgery is down by 23 days; MRI scans down by 13 days; general surgeries down by 21 days; pediatric surgery is down by 21 days.

Those are objective. They're measurable. They have been measured. They're transparent. We are making progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Doctors are also raising concerns. Dr. Alan Drummond is a spokesperson for the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. After the closures of ERs in Fort Erie and Port Colborne, he's sounding the alarm bells: "Let's not make health care decisions based on budgetary constraints within regional health authorities."

I ask the Premier again: Why are emergency room doctors raising concerns if patients aren't being affected?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to take this opportunity to thank all of our health care partners—the doctors, the nurses, the health care support workers, the pharmacists and everyone. They have, I would argue, a very heavy responsibility to express their opinion and demonstrate their judgment on a daily basis about what's going on in their own particular circumstances. But our responsibility in government is to keep an eye on the big picture, and the big picture is to ensure that there is always a sufficient level of funding available for our hospitals, particularly for our doctors and our nurses.

I think we can argue objectively, again, that the salaries have gone up, that funding levels have gone up, that there's more technology than ever before and access to more drugs than ever before. We're building hospitals like never before, expanding existing hospitals like never before and building cancer care clinics like never before. All of those are objective, and in the grand scheme of things we continue to make real progress.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This recession was not caused by Ontario families. Ontario families didn't drive Ontario into a deficit, and Ontario families didn't choose to give away billions of dollars to Bay Street in tax cuts. But this Premier has made that choice. Now he's asking the people of this province to pay more for health services. Instead of investing that money in their health care, he is giving it away.

Why does the Premier keep putting the health care of Ontario families last?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Of course I'm going to disagree with my honourable colleague. I want to remind her about the \$10 billion in tax cuts for people.

I also want to take umbrage with what my colleague says about families. Of course they want us to continue to find ways to invest in their health care. They want us to maintain the quality of services that we're providing to them today. But at the same time, they want us to take into account what has happened to our economy, to our revenue base. They want to ensure that we put in place a plan that addresses our deficit. They want to ensure that we don't burden their children and their grandchildren with a deficit for which we should have taken responsibility.

So we're going to, through the budget, continue to find that responsible balance, one that is informed by the values of Ontarians and that will ensure we continue to invest in important programs like education and health care and, at the same time, begin to address the deficit.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My question is for the Premier. Recent media reports quote members of the Liberal caucus saying that morale over there is lower than a garter snake in a puddle on a backcountry road. I'm not

saying that came from the member from Niagara Falls, but no one would blame him if it did.

You, Premier, have handed out to a foreign country billions of dollars, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to settle embarrassing lawsuits, used \$15 million to help elect the member from Winnipeg, and they're offering millions more to help your candidate in Ottawa–West Nepean.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I do not need any help from the armchair Speakers on the government side.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No. I'd just remind the honourable member of the warning I provided to the honourable member from Whitby–Oshawa. We refer to members who are here in this chamber.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Did you really think that taking \$15 million from emergency services in the member for Niagara Falls's riding wouldn't matter to the safety of that community?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to take this opportunity to speak to what is fundamentally an important issue. It's part of a bit of trickery in which my colleagues opposite are engaged.

The member for Toronto Centre, newly elected, spent some time outside the province of Ontario in another Canadian province. I think there are members in all our parties who have spent some time in another province and who are now representing Ontarians in our province. More than that, I think there are members in this Legislature who have spent a bit of time in another country before living in our province and representing people.

If they have something against people living in other provinces or something against people living in other countries, they should have the guts to stand up and say that. We're open to all Ontarians. We don't care where they come from. They are representing Ontarians here, and we're proud of that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Nepean–Carleton should be in her seat, as she knows.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will come to order.

Hon. James J. Bradley: "Outsiders not welcome."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Finance and Minister of Economic Development.

Start the clock. Supplementary?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: One day I hope to see a question answered in this Legislature.

The decision to rob \$15 million from the Niagara Health System says a lot about how little you care about listening to your own caucus, or maybe unelected political staff in your office is telling you that the member for Niagara Falls didn't try hard enough to see you. But recent Toronto Star reports suggest he's not alone in

feeling like Dalton McGuinty has left him on the outside. Several members of the Liberal caucus must be taking note of how Dalton McGuinty picks winners and losers.

What does it take for you to admit you made a mistake in forcing Fort Erie and Port Colborne to close their emergency rooms?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would be very proud, and I will be proud, to put our record up against the Conservative government's record when it comes to health care. I recall those days when they closed hospitals. I recall the day when they closed hospitals in my riding. I think Ontarians recall those days very well—not fondly, but they certainly recall those days.

I think they understand the experience they're living when it comes to their health care today: more hospitals, more health care, more doctors, more nurses, more family health teams, more nurse-practitioner-led clinics, more medical school spaces, more drugs, more technology, more of everything for Ontario families when it comes to their health care.

RETIREMENT HOMES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. The Ottawa Citizen reported this week on the needless death of an elderly woman let down by a system that should have been able to care for her but didn't. This woman was transferred to an unregulated for-profit retirement home in spite of her complex medical needs. New Democrats, health care workers, experts in the field and now the Ontario chief coroner have called for the regulation of retirement homes.

After years of broken promises, is the Premier finally willing to protect Ontario's frail and elderly and create a strong system of regulation for retirement homes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the minister responsible for seniors' issues.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Thanks for the question. I am proud to now be the minister responsible for seniors. It's an area of intense interest, obviously, to all members of the Legislature.

We have made a commitment to regulate retirement homes. We've had a fair bit of consultation across the province. I think we've made the statement that we will be introducing legislation in the spring session. We are on track to do that. It will make sure that we have the proper balance to protect residents of retirement homes and to ensure that they are adequately regulated.

The matter that I think she's talking about is also very much a health care matter, and retirement homes will not be the only part of the solution to the issue that she has raised.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, you did make a promise. That was in 2006. Yes, you did do extensive consultation. That was also in 2006.

In November 2008 I asked, "When are the regulations going to come out?" Let me quote what the minister responsible for seniors' issues said at the time: "We will

announce in months ahead, and the member will be pleased with the outcome of the work and discussion.” That was in 2008.

In 2009, I asked the same question again and got fed the same answer that the regulation was coming. Meanwhile we have people dying. You’ll have to excuse me if “the regulation is coming” is not the answer we want. We want action now.

How many more times will I have to stand in this House and ask before this government takes action and creates a province-wide regulatory system to protect the frail and elderly in retirement homes?

1100

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Again, I would hope that the member would listen carefully to my answer. What I said was that the solution to the problem that she is talking about may not rest with retirement home legislation; it may rest with ensuring that we have in place the proper procedures for when individuals are released from a hospital to another facility. The issue that she is talking about does require addressing; I just repeat that it may not be that it is in retirement home legislation that the solution to that problem rests. It may be that, in terms of the solution, it is how our other health care facilities deal with release of individuals.

The Minister of Health, I know, is aware of these issues. We’ll work together to find those solutions. I just repeat: It may not rest in retirement home legislation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, yesterday I was pleased to see Bill 242 introduced in the Legislature as Ontario moves toward implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year olds. It is clear that enhancing the earliest years of a child’s education will pay dividends far into the future. In our competitive global economy we need to prepare the most educated and skilled workers that we can, and full-day learning will begin to prepare our youngest pupils for the challenges ahead. The extended-day portion of the proposed act is also good for working parents who want to know that their children will be well looked after and have quality educational programming.

Minister, as this is a major undertaking in our education system, can you tell us how this program will be implemented across Ontario and when we will see our four- and five-year-olds in a full-day program?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We are very proud, as a government, to make this commitment to four- and five-year-old students in the province of Ontario. As has been identified, when we provide full-day learning it does enable students to be more successful in reading, writing and math. When they are more successful in those early years they will be more successful throughout school and more likely to graduate. We are providing the well-educated workforce for the new economy.

What I can also say is that we have worked very closely with school boards across Ontario. They have identified for us those schools in their communities that have the capacity, where we can begin to roll this program out and where the need is most important. We are looking forward to, in the days ahead, the excitement that’s going to come in our communities when four- and five-year-olds can—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Minister, it is clear that this is the right policy for strengthening our education system and enhancing our future workforce, but this policy also helps children from families who are in high-need communities right across this province. We, as a government, have committed ourselves to a poverty reduction strategy in Ontario, and the introduction of full-day learning for our youngest students will assist parents and children who struggle every day for a better life.

In my riding of Ottawa Centre there are neighbourhoods that could clearly really benefit from this program. I’m hopeful that this kind of programming for kids and families will go a long way to undermining poverty in a meaningful way. Minister, can you tell us how this policy will help those in high-need communities across the province and what this program will mean for those in need in my community of Ottawa Centre when it is implemented?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: There’s a great deal of excitement about this announcement and there are many questions about it, so I do appreciate the member, who is focused on the needs of his riding.

As he has indicated, poverty reduction is going to be impacted by this investment. We know that more than one half of the phase one schools are in areas where local boards have identified that there are high needs. In the member’s riding, actually, I am able to say that there are two schools that have been identified: Cambridge Street Community Public School and W.E. Gowling Public School. They are located in high-need areas. We thank the boards and we look forward to continuing to work with boards as we roll this very important initiative out.

Parents want this. This is good for our kids and this is good for our economy going forward. This is an investment in our future. We are absolutely committed to it and it will be successful because of the partner—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier. I appreciated his comments earlier about those of us from different parts of the country.

What are you afraid Ontario families will learn from a public inquiry into eHealth, an auditor’s review of the Samsung deal, and a coroner’s inquest into the tragic death of Reilly Anzovino?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure I caught a question there, but I did hear reference to the word "Samsung."

I just want to reiterate how important this new industry is that we are building together here in Ontario, and that is green energy, energy from renewable sources: the wind, the sun, biomass and the like.

We have just secured the largest investment of its kind in the world, and it's happening here in Ontario. It will lead to 16,000 jobs, four manufacturing plants and 2,500 megawatts of clean, renewable, green energy. Most importantly, it's going to give us the capacity to export our products—wind turbines, solar panels and the like—south of the border to a burgeoning green industry in the United States of America. We're going to position ourselves as the leading green-energy cluster in North America, ready to meet that capacity.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. McGuinty knows who got rich off the untendered contracts in the eHealth scandal, because he did the deals. He knows the secret details of his mother-of-all-untendered-contracts to Samsung. And he had a hand in cutting the emergency services from Port Colborne and Fort Erie.

We have been the ones calling for a public inquiry into eHealth. We've called for the auditor's review of the Samsung deal. We have called for the coroner's inquest. The only thing standing in the way of all these accountability measures is Dalton McGuinty. What makes you think you are going to get away with it?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague very much supports the new rules that we have put in place. They require that expense claim information for all cabinet ministers, parliamentary assistants, political staff and senior management within the Ontario public service be posted online on the government's website.

What the Minister of Government Services has asked of the leader of the official opposition is his agreement to also post online the expense claim information of the official opposition's office. We're wondering: If we agree to this transparency and accountability, why won't they as well?

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, I congratulate you and I hope it's the job you really wanted.

Ten of the province's largest school boards have asked you to change the way special education is funded. There are still 36,000 elementary and 4,800 secondary students waiting for special education services. The boards have asked for a timely, transparent process to address growing demands, demands that the Liberal government has so far disregarded. What is your government going to do to clear up this growing mess?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Ensuring that we have adequate resources to meet the needs of our students in

schools who have been identified with special needs has been a priority for this government. I can say that, and I can also say that we have increased funding for special education in our schools since coming to government—

Hon. James J. Bradley: How much?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Thirty-nine per cent. So I think that demonstrates very clearly that we do want to continue to work with boards.

When we arrived, there was a funding formula that was not working effectively. Now we have a special education funding model. There are five components in the way the support for special education is delivered to schools. We will continue to work with boards to understand how we can improve the direction of those dollars. But I do think it's fair to say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

1110

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I say that there are 36,000 students waiting for services at the elementary level and close to 5,000 at the secondary level waiting for services. Your answer is, "We've increased funding by 39%." It doesn't jive; it doesn't make any sense.

According to the senior superintendent of special education at the Toronto District School Board, "The province's funding model underestimates the count of special needs students and the complexity of their needs." The Peel board claims that a shortfall in terms of special education can leave students waiting for months for special education assessment—in some cases, years. This problem is but one example of your ministry's indifference to the needs of Ontario students.

You promised a review in 2003, and then you re-promised that review in 2010. Will you tell us when this much-needed review will actually take place?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: What I think is very important for the people of Ontario to understand is that we have increased support for special education by 39%, and we have done that in the face of declining enrolment. Our commitment to our special education students is actually very firm.

I would also say to the honourable member, with respect to how those dollars are delivered, that the former parliamentary assistant on this file, the member from Guelph, did a consultation with all of our partners in education on the grants for student needs. The grants for student needs are the vehicle that delivers dollars to school boards to support students. We have had some very good consultations. I am in the process of reviewing that feedback at this time.

Since coming to government, we have continually improved the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the new Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I

want to congratulate the member from Huron—Bruce. I know she'll do a great job for Ontario's farmers.

I know, Minister, that as one of your first official duties, you attended the federal, provincial and territorial agriculture ministers' meeting, which was held here in Toronto. These meetings, of course, are an excellent opportunity for ministers from across Canada to discuss the opportunities and the challenges that are faced by our farmers.

Minister, as the agriculture and agri-food industry is the second-largest economic driver in this province and for most of our rural ridings the primary driver, could you tell the House what issues you raised on behalf of Ontario's farmers in order to ensure the long-term future and the economic viability of this very important sector?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Thank you for the question. I just wanted to share with the House how proud I am to be the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It really is a proud day for me.

This meeting was an important opportunity for me, as the new minister, to meet with my federal and provincial colleagues. The FPT meetings allow for discussion of the key issues facing agriculture and food sectors in a national context. The meetings provided an opportunity to review progress on the key commitments that were made in 2009 at the annual ministers' conference, specifically relating to the strategic review of the business risk management programs and national initiatives such as food safety and traceability.

My priority was to ensure that the national BRM strategic review moves forward aggressively. Ontario farmers are dissatisfied with the suite of programs that are available to them, and I made that clear to my federal, provincial and territorial colleagues—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Minister, I know that you've been pushing for a national business risk management strategic review since before becoming minister, and it's certainly something that Ontario farmers have been asking their federal members for.

I'm also aware that you've been asking our farmers to support your efforts to push the federal government to come to the table as partners, and that has been consistently brought up to me as I've gone from farm meeting to farm meeting this winter, so I know it is a priority for the farmers of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and for all Ontario farmers.

Farmers have been telling me the same thing they have told you; that is, they are dissatisfied with parts of the existing suite of programs. They say it's not working for them, and they don't want to wait until 2013 for that review.

Minister, I understand that you presented the Ontario agriculture stability coalition's proposal at the FPT meeting. Can you share with us how that was received and what the next steps will be?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I did raise the fact that Ontario has already started a dialogue with our provincial produc-

ers in relation to the business risk management strategic review under way. I want to reinforce the need to address the producers' concerns. They want complexity, bankability and predictability in the programs, and the suite of programs, quite frankly, doesn't meet that test any longer.

The coalition of Ontario stakeholders has developed a draft proposal which I presented at the FPT meeting, and I expect that that proposal will be considered as the national review process moves forward by the national government.

The federal government laid out the next step of the review specifically targeted toward business risk management, on which I am thoroughly speaking out and saying, "Get engaged. Provide your input. This is your opportunity."

I encourage all Ontario producers to participate. I expect that the dialogue we have started will continue, and I look forward to participating in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Education. As you know, bullying remains a very serious issue and a frequent occurrence in our schools. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, approximately one third of students are bullied and almost one third have indicated that they have bullied others. So today I've introduced a resolution for debate, calling on the Ontario government to officially recognize the third week of each November as bullying awareness and prevention week.

I ask you today, can we count on—can I count on—your support for our resolution?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Of course you can.

I think it's important for everyone in this House to understand that we all come here for the same reason. I agree with the honourable member that any time and every time we can act co-operatively to address very important issues like bullying, particularly in our schools, I think you have the goodwill of everyone in this place.

I would also like to say that the honourable member would be aware that on February 1 of this year, the keeping our kids safe at school act came into effect, and as part of that we now require at schools that parents of students who have been victims of bullying must now be recognized. It requires, as well, that school staff work directly with all—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much, Minister. I know that the families who are gathered in the gallery today, who appeared at a press conference with me to share their stories, will be pleased to hear that you are prepared to support the recognition of the third week in November as raising the awareness of bullying and focusing our efforts on preventing it.

I ask you: Can we all then be assured that Ontario schools will officially recognize this week, the third week of November, this year, in 2010?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's also important to remember and recognize the good work that has been going on in our schools by our schoolteachers and all members of staff to address the very serious issue of bullying. They very much have appreciated the regulations that have come to assist them and support them to deal with these important issues.

I want to say in this Legislature as well that we are providing professional development around this very important piece of work: training for 7,500 principals and 25,000 teachers. We do want to make very clear the statement to parents and to students who come to our schools that it must be a safe place for them to be. We are going to do everything in our power to ensure that the information around our commitment and the processes that will protect children—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1120

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. As employees at the Brockville Mental Health Centre are handed layoff notices, we know there are plans to transfer a 24-bed acute care unit from the mental health centre to Brockville General Hospital. There is just one problem. The hospital's president says there is a \$1.5-million shortfall to make the transition actually work.

Given this Premier's penchant for by-election bailouts, can the citizens of Brockville expect a cheque from the government soon, or is this by-election race not quite close enough to warrant another 11th-hour spending spree to keep vital services where they're needed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I met with the now Senator Runciman shortly before he left this place to go to the place of eternal love about issues facing us in Brockville and I committed to him that we would look carefully at the proposals that he had laid out for us.

What I can tell you is, when it comes to hospital funding, our hospital partners are doing really tough work right now. We've asked them to take on some challenges, and they're working closely with the LHINs. They're going through their budgets line by line, trying to find places where they can actually save some money so we can reinvest that in better patient care.

We've increased hospital funding by 42% since we were elected in 2003. This year alone, we increased hospital funding by almost—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In a community where health sector layoffs are widespread and the future of the mental health centre remains in doubt, people are rightfully worried when they hear that an acute care unit is to be

transferred and then find out that there's not even enough money in the bank to actually do it.

A government spokesperson told reporters a few days ago that the Ministry of Health is committed to a "smooth transition" of the acute care unit. If the government's "smooth transition" doesn't mean a \$1.5-million cheque will arrive a day before voters go to the polls, can the Premier instead tell us today exactly what his government will do to ensure there will be no cuts to health care services for the people of Brockville?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The leader of the third party has a level of cynicism that I just can't accept.

We're working very hard to protect the progress we've made in health care across this province. There are cases where we do understand that a hospital needs more funding in order to continue to provide the services in that community. This is part of the work we do in the ministry all the time.

The hospital is working with the LHIN. It should not come as news to anyone that we're committed to keeping our health care system strong. These are difficult times. Hospitals are working hard to find the savings without impacting patient care, and that is happening across the province as well as in the great riding of Leeds-Grenville.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, strong transit systems are a key to a vibrant economy. In my riding of Willowdale, a huge number of my constituents rely on public transit to get to work, to school, to visit friends and family, and to take advantage of everything the GTA has to offer.

Our government delivered on a major platform commitment by creating Metrolinx and by tasking it with making it easier for folks to get around the GTA and Hamilton by public transit. This fights congestion. It creates jobs. It helps to build Ontario's economy.

Minister, what is Metrolinx doing to help Ontarians use public transit effectively and efficiently?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for Willowdale for the question.

Last year, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development estimated that congestion on our roads cost us about \$6 billion. Metrolinx is doing great work to improve transit. This is not an option; this is something that must happen—reduce congestion and get people out of cars and into transit.

I've had the opportunity to meet with Metrolinx leadership on several occasions already, and I look forward to working with them as we implement the plans.

As you know, our \$11.5-billion MoveOntario 2020 funding commitment is the foundation of the Metrolinx regional transit plan. Last year, the Premier announced that we're moving ahead with \$9 billion for priority transit projects, including the York Viva bus rapid transit, Scarborough rapid transit line, Eglinton crosstown light rapid transit and Finch West light rapid transit.

As I said, these aren't optional. These must go forward if we're going to remove the congestion on our roads that both the member from Willowdale—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, my constituents in Willowdale need reliable and affordable public transit, whether they're travelling within Willowdale or trying to get to the downtown Toronto core. Public transit in Toronto is essential to making Toronto a livable and prosperous city, but we know that the challenge is that municipalities are struggling with this \$6-billion cost of congestion. In my opinion, it's critically important that our government continue its investment in support of municipal transportation needs.

Minister, what has this government done to support public transit in Toronto, and more importantly, how will we maintain our level of commitment in these very, very tough economic times?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Despite the tough economic times, we are moving ahead. We estimate that the Metrolinx project will create more than 429,000 jobs over the next 25 years, so it's a significant investment. It goes without saying that I share this keen interest in transit because my constituents are also dependent, as are all of our constituents, on an effective GTA transit system. We've committed \$12 billion to fund transit projects in Toronto. So if we think of Toronto as the hub of those needs, we've already committed that \$12 billion. That includes \$3.5 billion to the city of Toronto and \$8 billion to Metrolinx for projects for rapid transit, as I said, along Eglinton, Scarborough, Finch West and Sheppard East. We've also delivered on our commitment to provide two cents per litre of provincial gas tax. That's something no other government has done, and that's \$164 million a year to the city of Toronto—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: A question to the Premier: Well over 1,000 steelworkers at US Steel in Nanticoke have been laid off and locked out since last March. They've been out in the cold for almost a year now.

My question to you, Premier: Have you or has your minister met with the company? Have you met with the steelworkers? Have you taken any steps whatsoever to save these jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: To the member's question, the Ministry of Labour has an experienced, knowledgeable mediation team that is always there to work with the parties. I mentioned yesterday a labour dispute that is happening—not this one, but I'll speak to this one in particular. My focus and the Ministry of Labour's focus is always to work with the parties so that they can put their differences aside, so that they can come back to the

table and find that common ground where they can get a collective agreement done.

We respect the collective bargaining process. It has worked very well for Ontario. Our labour relations record today is the best it has ever been in 30 years. Over 97% of all collective agreements are done without any work stoppage. But we always encourage the parties to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Back to the Premier: I don't think you've done anything. It has been almost a year. Families are being split apart; people are losing their homes. This is a foreign-owned company. Have you met with the federal government? Do you have a policy for primary industry? You haven't met with the mayors of Norfolk, Hamilton and Haldimand. I'll make this very clear: You don't have your mediation team working 24/7 on this one. What have you personally done in the past year to get a thousand steelworkers back to work?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The member is wrong. This is an active file, and what I can say is that our mediation team is always looking for ways to assist the parties to get them back to the table, to work through those differences. Unlike the member here who looks at divisive ways of separating groups, we look at bringing them together.

As I said, our labour relations system is one of the best in the world and the mediation team there works as hard as they can to do all that they can to assist the parties. That is the right thing to do. The wrong thing to do is what the member is doing here, and that is dividing the parties, dividing the community. We do not agree.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. It's well-known that Metrolinx has been subjecting residents in west Toronto to deafening pile-driving. In the fall, the pile-driving was condemned by the Canadian Transportation Agency as being unreasonable and having caused undue harm.

1130

Within the last two weeks, a federal court denied Metrolinx leave to appeal the Canadian Transportation Agency's decision. Yesterday we learned that Metrolinx plans to appeal that decision of the federal court.

Why is this agency wasting valuable public dollars to litigate, rather than complying with the CTA ruling?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, let me just say that the member opposite has information that I do not have, because my understanding is that that decision has not been made. But that is, in a way, beside the point.

First of all, I want to say that I have visited the site. I have looked at Hook Avenue. I've looked at the site. I've listened to the pile-driving. I understand that there has been a disruption in people's lives and I'm very sympathetic to that. But that's also why I'm pleased that Metrolinx has complied with the order in terms of shrouding

the piles and using the equipment that is much less disruptive to people's lives.

The point here is that we must complete these projects. We must deal with the congestion that the member from Willowdale was just speaking about. We must move ahead and build the next era of transportation in the GTA. We have to do that. In 25 years, when my—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The fact is that Metrolinx is more interested in dragging this issue through the courts than in dealing with the residents and responding to their complaints.

The solution is clear. The CTA has given them a solution. Metrolinx's pile-driving must use quieter technology. Rob Prichard was in my office promising to do the same, before he turned around and appealed the decision. Why won't the minister intervene to stop Metrolinx from using taxpayers' dollars to fight taxpayers?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me be clear: The decision has not been made. Let me also be clear that the compliance and the mitigation orders have been complied with, and the noise has been reduced.

Let me also be clear: We're talking about hundreds of thousands of jobs. We're talking about jobs that will drive our economy and will create a transit system that will be functional for this region.

In 25 years, when my granddaughter wants to come downtown, I don't want her to say, "Grandma, what were you doing? You were the Minister of Transportation and you didn't push ahead a transit system that works for this region." That's what we have to do.

I would have hoped that the member opposite would have been interested in those jobs, would have been interested in the economic driver, and would have ultimately been interested in a functional transit system for the GTA.

VIOLENCE FAMILIALE

M. Phil McNeely: Ma question est pour la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires.

J'apprécie le travail qu'a fait votre ministère dans toute la province pour soutenir et protéger les femmes et les enfants qui sont victimes de la violence domestique. Pourriez-vous informer cette Assemblée de ce que le gouvernement a fait dans ce domaine, et notamment dans la région de mes commettants?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais remercier mon collègue pour la question. Permettez-moi de vous donner quelques exemples récents.

Notre gouvernement a récemment annoncé un financement de 3 \$ millions à Ottawa pour la Maison Intervalle, pour la construction d'un nouveau refuge. Cela fait partie du plan gouvernemental d'investir 50 \$ millions dans les infrastructures, et avec ceci, nous créerons 450 nouveaux emplois, dont 100 nouveaux emplois dans l'est ontarien.

Nous avons aussi, dans la région de Waterloo, donné 3,5 \$ millions pour Women's Crisis Services. Mon collègue ici qui représente Waterloo a été un fier défenseur de ce groupe. Alors, j'étais très heureuse de pouvoir y participer.

J'aimerais ajouter que hier j'ai eu le bonheur d'annoncer la première maison d'hébergement francophone à Toronto. La province va investir 5,2 \$ millions pour ce refuge qui était demandé depuis trop longtemps.

Ces quelques exemples montrent que la lutte contre la violence domestique était l'une des priorités de notre gouvernement. Nous avons respecté notre promesse et nous continuons de le faire en collaboration avec nos partenaires du secteur.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to recognize the member from Kitchener-Waterloo. She had some guests and we moved quickly through and they didn't get introduced, so I will give her that opportunity.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to recognize the people who joined me for my press conference this morning as we attempted to do everything we could to raise awareness on the prevention of bullying.

I'd like to introduce Katie Neu and her father. She represents Bullying Canada. She was a student in our schools. I'd like to recognize Sunnie McFadden-Curtis from Benchboy Productions, and also, Lesa McDougall from Bluewater Citizens for Education, and her daughter, as well as Karen Cameron from Bluewater Citizens for Education. These are all people who have experienced bullying first-hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to ask members to extend a special welcome to a group of students from Sterling Hall School who are visiting Queen's Park today with their teacher, Mrs. Elizabeth Gray, from that renowned school. And I want to extend a very warm welcome to student Spencer Van Winters, whose father, Kees, made a special point of alerting us to the fact that his son would be in the chamber today, and let me know that he is an aspiring politician as well.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my great pleasure to welcome Councillor Godwin Chan and Councillor David Cohen of Richmond Hill. Councillor David Quinn has been serving our town of Richmond Hill for 22 years.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity to welcome a good friend of mine, Lori Baldwin-Sands. Lori is an alderman from my home town

of St. Thomas, a very conscientious member of council and a good friend as well. Lori, welcome to Queen's Park today. It's great to have you here.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize Greg Haskett and Dennis Aarts from Oxford Pork. I appreciate them coming to Queen's Park to reinforce the crisis that our hog producers are facing.

In fact, the decision of the appeal tribunal said, "All parties agree that the Ontario hog production industry is now in a state of crisis, has been in a state of crisis for some time, and seems likely to remain in a state of crisis for the foreseeable future."

These farmers are not the only ones in trouble; fruit, vegetable and beef producers are on the same sinking boat. Current support programs are not working. They are based on average production margins. Put simply, if you make zero, the government will give you exactly the same amount. The McGuinty government response was to quietly reallocate \$82 million from support programs to their own priorities.

Three months ago, I asked the Minister of Agriculture this question: Why would the government pull out its promised money, right when our farmers need it the most? Let's hope the fresh minister has not gotten enough training to break promises yet.

I ask the minister to commit to make sure farmers get every single penny of the \$325 million allocated for support programs.

Ontario needs to adopt a business risk management program for all sectors. There's no time for excuses. The grain and oilseeds program has already proven it works and should be continued today.

I believe our farmers deserve support, and I am hopeful that my colleagues across the floor will realize it too.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: This past November, I had a great opportunity, with some other members of the House, to participate in an event for Local Democracy Week right here at Queen's Park. It's a project that's been designed to ensure that youths recognize that change can be made in their communities through the power of democracy.

Nearly 200 high-school students from Toronto were here at Queen's Park and city hall. The featured program included remarks from Craig Kielburger, co-founder of Free the Children, and other speakers. It also included interactive sessions with politicians, which even involved an entertaining round of political speed dating.

Every election, we hear the news about voter turnout. In particular, we hear that the youngest age group consistently has the lowest turnout. There may be a number of reasons for this, but we also know that young people in our community are participating in many other ways. From organizing environmental committees in their schools, to leading fundraisers to help people recover from tragedies such as the earthquake in Haiti, the young people in our community intend to make a difference.

Local Democracy Week wants to capture these interests of our youth, teach them how democracy can bring about positive change and address the important issues in our community.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the organizers of Local Democracy Week. They organized a great event here at Queen's Park, and I'd encourage all other members to come out to next year's Local Democracy Week.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Norm Miller: We heard this week about the millions of health care dollars that are being diverted away from Ontario patients. Since 2006-07, more than \$176 million has been directed towards salaries and administration at Mr. McGuinty's unelected, unaccountable local health boards. In 2006, there were 40 bureaucrats making \$100,000 or more per year. Three years later, the list of local health integration network, or LHIN, bureaucrats making more than \$100,000 is up 150% to a total of 95, and executive salaries are up 213%.

The Minister of Health may want us to believe that the LHINs make those salary decisions. Her intervention with \$15 million for the Toronto Grace hospital during the Toronto Centre by-election proves that the buck stops with her.

I raised the point of high salaries in the administration of health care with the Minister of Health this week when we met on Tuesday to discuss local health issues. She acknowledged that there is a need to review salaries.

The people of Parry Sound-Muskoka are very concerned that health care funds reach their destination—front-line health care workers and patients. The minister and the McGuinty government must be accountable for those dollars. That's their job.

FRANCES LANKIN

Mr. Michael Prue: This morning, when I got back after question period, there was a press release on my desk to announce that Frances Lankin was stepping down as CEO of the United Way of Toronto. She is stepping down to spend time with her husband and family in the small community of Restoule.

Mr. Norm Miller: In Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, in Parry Sound-Muskoka.

I just wanted to stand today to talk about the remarkable job she has done for the United Way in this city and the region for the last eight and a half years.

I also cast my mind to remember the remarkable job she has done throughout her life, particularly in the last 25 years. This was a woman who started out as a corrections officer, became a union leader, became an MPP, became a cabinet minister, became a leadership contender for the New Democratic Party, and, finally, ended up as CEO of the United Way.

Along the way, she made a remarkable difference to our city, to this Legislature. One of her small, little bills, private member's Bill 44, was to get a third councillor for East York following the megacity, and my community is forever thankful for that bill.

One of the things she did as CEO was to come out with Poverty by Postal Code, so that everyone understands where the poor places are in Toronto and what needs to be done to fix them.

We wish her and her husband, Wayne, much happiness in this new phase of their lives. We thank her from the bottom of our hearts for what she's done to date.

FAMILY LITERACY DAY

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On January 27, Premier Dalton McGuinty and I had the pleasure of visiting St. Valentine Elementary School in my riding of Mississauga-Brampton South. The reason for our visit was to celebrate Family Literacy Day, which takes place every year on January 27 to encourage families to read and learn together. The Premier and I read a story to the children, and the children, in turn, recited a poem to us.

Family Literacy Day reminds us that when families are doing fun activities together, like singing a song, playing a game, following a recipe or reading a map, they are strengthening their literacy skills. These skills are essential for success at school, work and in life. Reading at an early age lays the foundation for strong literacy skills.

The Ontario government is doing its part to improve literacy by launching full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds in almost 600 schools this September. By making education a priority, we are laying the foundation for a stronger workforce.

I really enjoyed my time at St. Valentine school. The staff and the children were great. I look forward to going back to the school in the future.

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YVONNE MARTIN

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I rise today to pay tribute to the memory of a truly remarkable woman, Yvonne Martin. Yvonne, a nurse, was on her fourth medical mission to the impoverished country of Haiti. On January 12, 90 minutes after arriving, a devastating earthquake shook the country and destroyed the guesthouse where she was staying.

Although we mourn her death, we remain extremely proud of her life. At her memorial celebration at Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church, a church we both

attended, the following statement was made: "Yvonne's life was a testament to God's enduring gift of love to us."

Yes, no one forced Yvonne to leave the safety of Canada for a medical mission to one of the poorest countries in the world. She had fully earned her retirement after 36 years of caring for patients at the Elmira Medical Clinic. Yet she felt moved by her strong Christian faith to use her nursing skills to help those in need. Yvonne had come to love the people of Haiti, and she was moved to try to improve their lives in the midst of their daily struggles.

Hundreds came out on Wednesday, January 21, to remember and celebrate Yvonne's rich life, faith and family, including her husband, Ron, her three sons and 10 grandchildren, to whom we express our condolences.

Since her death, many tributes have poured in and many articles have been written. An editorial in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record on January 15 perhaps says it best: "Our world needs more Yvonne Martins." How true.

TOWN OF RICHMOND HILL

Mr. Reza Moridi: I rise here today to speak about the great town of Richmond Hill. In a report released by the Conference Board of Canada, Richmond Hill has received top grades. The town is only one of six Canadian municipalities to receive an A grade.

Richmond Hill is top of the class when compared to 50 other cities across seven different categories. Richmond Hill has been ranked second overall for the category of innovation—the only one in the GTA. This level of category is the result of our highly skilled residents who have contributed in increasing Richmond Hill's calibre in this category.

The report describes Richmond Hill as "among Canada's most attractive places and tops the field of suburban communities." The report also states that Richmond Hill has become the second-most diverse city in Canada, after Toronto. Also noted is the town's well-educated workforce and the low crime rate.

Please join me in congratulating the town of Richmond Hill's residents, members of the council, represented today here by Councillor David Cohen and Councillor Godwin Chan, the mayor and all of the great public servants who have helped develop the town into not only a great place to live, but also a great place to work and invest.

SHELLEY-ANN BROWN

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: On Tuesday, February 23, Canada's women's bobsled team will compete against the best in the world at the Vancouver Winter Olympics with the objective of a gold medal for the first time. One of those fine athletes is Shelley-Ann Brown of the city of Pickering and my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East. I know that the residents of Pickering are fully and enthusiastically behind Shelley-Ann and are anxiously awaiting the bobsled event.

Shelley-Ann joined the bobsled community on the World Cup circuit three years ago as a brakeman and has made impressive strides in her quest to be at the top of the Olympic podium. Shelley-Ann teamed up with Kaillie Humphries of Calgary and has gone on to finish with a silver at the World Cup event in 2009 at Park City in the USA.

Shelley-Ann is a great athlete who attended the University of Nebraska on a track scholarship and went on to be named the Husker Power Athlete of the Year in 2002 and finished fifth in the 100-metre hurdles at the NCAA Championships in 2003. It was her abilities in track that first attracted the attention of bobsled pilot Suzanne Gavine-Hlady, who convinced Shelley-Ann to go to Calgary and give bobsledding a try. The rest is history, and according to her sister, Frances, "Shelley-Ann's lifelong dream has been to represent Canada at the Olympics. When she joins with her fellow athletes at the opening ceremonies, proudly representing Canada and doing her best to bring home a medal, her dreams will be fulfilled!"

I know that all members of this House join me in wishing the best for Shelley-Ann and all her teammates at the VANOC 2010 Games. Go, Canada. Own the podium.

REUVEN BULKA

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased to rise today to congratulate Rabbi Reuven Bulka on the recent announcement that he will be given the keys to the city of Ottawa.

As you know, I rose in this House this week with a member's statement to mark the beginning of Kindness Week, but we would not have been celebrating another highly successful Kindness Week in Ottawa if it were not for Rabbi Bulka, whose enthusiasm and dedication to improving the world around him have enriched so many lives, including my own.

Rabbi Bulka has a distinguished career as a spiritual leader, author, radio host, columnist, TV host and contributor to scholarly journals. He has led the Congregation Machzikei Hadas in Ottawa since 1967 and holds Sunday Night with Rabbi Bulka on CFRA, along with his own television call-in program titled In Good Faith.

A prolific writer, he has published over 30 books and academic articles in the fields of religion, health and psychology throughout his career.

A dedicated grassroots volunteer, Rabbi Bulka is renowned for his tireless commitment to the Ottawa community through his service on countless charitable and civic boards, regular participation in charity events and, of course, spearheading Kindness Week.

Rabbi Bulka is a great man and a true inspiration to us all. Despite his high public profile and busy schedule, he remains very accessible to his congregants and his community at large for support, encouragement, advice, questions or quandaries. I know I've been privileged to have his counsel and support.

To Rabbi Bulka, I congratulate you on your long-standing and distinguished service to our community and your outstanding contribution to our city. I cannot think of a better person to entrust with the keys to our city than you.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: At the beginning of proceedings, when I extended a welcome to the students from Sterling Hall School, they had not yet arrived in the chamber. I wanted all members to take a look at this class and see how finely dressed they are in their uniforms. I want to welcome them in a special way, and their teacher, Mrs. Gray. Everyone here would recognize Spencer Van Winters, I'm sure. Could we have him—there he is, right there. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome to Queen's Park.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Haldimand-Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Labour concerning US Steel. This matter will be debated next Tuesday at 6 p.m.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HEART MONTH

MOIS DU COEUR

Hon. Margaret R. Best: February is Heart Month. I want to take this opportunity, first of all, to welcome—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member that if you're going to be wearing a scarf that is identifiable, you may want to ask for unanimous consent of the House to wear that scarf.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your direction. I would like to ask your permission and the permission of the House to wear it.

Interjections: Agreed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed. Please continue.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Thank you. I am wearing the Heart and Stroke Foundation scarf for heart.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. David Sculthorpe, the CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and Ms. Nadia Yee to the House today.

I rise in the House today to remind Ontarians that heart disease is growing at an alarming rate. Every year, heart disease and stroke are responsible for one in three deaths in Canada.

For many decades, we have considered heart disease an affliction that mostly affects Caucasian men. This could not be further from the truth. On January 25 of this

year, the Heart and Stroke Foundation released their annual report on Canadians' health. It clearly stated that the face of heart disease has drastically changed due to the addition of several new groups now considered at risk. They include young adults in their 20s and 30s, women between 35 and 45, baby boomers within the 50-to-64-year range, ethnocultural communities and aboriginal peoples.

Mostly to blame for these alarming facts are unhealthy habits and sedentary lifestyles we have adopted in the past two decades.

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The direct impact has caused obesity levels across the age spectrum to soar to dangerously high levels. Many Ontarians are at unhealthy weights. According to the report, our young people are beginning their adult lives with multiple risk factors for heart disease, including obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. As distressing as this sounds, what is even more tragic is that even today, while many people do understand that heart disease can largely be prevented by taking steps to improve their own health and their children's health, they are not taking those steps.

We must remember that children model their parents, teachers and caregivers. As adults, we have a responsibility to take the lead, to lead by example, and that includes all of us in this House. We should lead by example by being active every day, eating healthy foods, reducing our amount of salt intake, being smoke-free and managing stress. We simply cannot afford to be complacent.

I commend the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario for their research and advice on cardiovascular disease, and I am grateful to count them among our partners in prevention.

The government of Ontario is working with a wide variety of community-based partners, including the Ontario Heart and Stroke Foundation, on several strategies that are focused on priority and disadvantaged populations. Healthy eating and physical activity are priorities for the Ministry of Health Promotion, as is evident with the following initiatives to prevent obesity and heart disease: the healthy communities fund, a province-wide investment for local groups to promote physical activity, healthy eating and healthy living; Ontario's after-school initiative, a new program for children and youth in priority communities that provides supervised programming from 3:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. on physical activity, nutrition and wellness; and also EatRight Ontario, a free service providing nutrition and healthy eating advice from registered dietitians online and by telephone in more than 110 languages.

These initiatives are some key programs for a healthier Ontario. The Ministry of Health Promotion, along with its partners, continue to provide supportive environments and access to education, information and services to assist Ontarians in making informed decisions to change behaviours and live healthier, more active lives.

The phrase "prevention is better than cure" is relevant in more ways than one. It is easier to develop healthy habits than it is to influence and change settled, unhealthy behaviours.

As we are in the midst of cheering on our incredible Olympic athletes in Vancouver, I take this opportunity to wish all our athletes well. I also want to acknowledge our athletes that we fund in the province of Ontario at this time. It is perfect for us to take this opportunity to embrace the passion that our athletes have for healthy living, sport and physical activity. Our Olympians are role models for healthy living; let us all take a lesson from them. Get out, get active. We are what we eat. Eat healthy.

Ontarians, our health is indeed our wealth. It is the most important asset that we have. In this Heart Month, let us celebrate our hearts for one simple and one profound reason: Our lives depend on a healthy heart.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Health Promotion on behalf of my colleague Gerry Martiniuk, who is unable to be with us today. He writes:

"A perfect storm.' Those are the dire words used by the Heart and Stroke Foundation to describe the challenges facing the health of Canadians. According to the foundation's 2010 annual report, a perfect storm of risk factors and demographic changes are coming together to create an unprecedented burden on Canada's fragmented system of cardiovascular care, and no Canadian, young or old, will be left unaffected.

"It's a sad day when the young people of our province are threatened with heart disease.

"This is a warning that we, as leaders of our province, must take seriously and must address through the creation of a strategic plan to meet this challenge and protect the health of our citizens.

"Studies show that the prevalence of childhood obesity has clearly been increasing. We all know that these obese children face an increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and other serious complications. What are we doing to protect these young people from illness? What are we doing to promote healthy eating habits and lifestyles?"—and the minister has reported some of them.

"Heart disease is the second leading cause of death in Canada, preceded only by cancer. A staggering one in three Ontarians suffer from a chronic disease.

"Our party's approach is simple: The prevention of chronic diseases improves outcomes. Prior to 2003, our party revitalized Ontario's anti-tobacco initiative, making it one of the most ambitious tobacco-control programs in Canada at that time. We're proud of the fact that we launched the heart health program, one of the most far-reaching cardiovascular disease prevention programs in North America to date.

"Ontario's lack of electronic patient records causes real concerns in measuring and therefore in managing

chronic disease. Ontario is failing to meet the chronic disease challenge.

"As February is Heart Month, I wish to personally thank the Heart and Stroke Foundation for its commitment to improving the health of Ontarians."

Locally, in my own riding, we have a Heart and Stroke Foundation luncheon every year, and every year it's a sellout and we have great speakers. This year it was held at the Hawk Ridge Golf and Country Club.

I also wanted to pay recognition to two outstanding teams in our area. Team Glenn Howard are now, for the fifth year in a row, the Ontario curling champions. They barely missed out on qualifying for the Olympics. Team Kevin Martin, of course, won, and they're fighting to be the Olympic champions in curling.

On top of that, I also wanted to pay recognition to a young gentleman, Adam Dixon, from the Midland area, who's on the national Canadian Paralympic team as part of the sledge hockey team and is doing very, very well.

We've had some things happening in this House, and I wanted to bring up the harmonized sales tax, because as we talk about creating a healthy environment and creating opportunities for young people, the first thing we're doing, in a lot of cases, is we're adding this new tax on July 1, another 8%. I think of things like skiing: If you want to take your family out for a day of skiing, what will happen? You're going to pay another 8%. If you want to go to a cross-country ski trail, you'll be paying another 8%. If you want to walk the golf course—walk 18 holes—you'll pay 8% more for your golf membership. Why does the government not get this? If you're talking about trying to eat healthy, if you're trying to—

Mr. Bob Delaney: That's incorrect. That's incorrect.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: He can babble on all he wants over there, but the reality is that I'm right on this. The reality is that this is another tax and it's a tax on keeping people healthy. I'm very sorry that he's taking this to be so negative. As I look across at you, I understand what's wrong. You don't get it. You've already swallowed this poison. The reality is that you need to make tax credits for people so they can eat healthy, so they can join a gym and sports organizations, so they can ski and golf and get outside. And what are we doing here? We're adding more taxes. That's a disgrace, when we're taking things like the Heart and Stroke Foundation and taking an opportunity here when we should be looking for resolutions and things for the future. What are we doing in this Legislature? We're adding, coming July 1, another 8% on to everything anybody wants to do in a proactive manner to make their lifestyles healthier.

I do want to congratulate and welcome the members from the Heart and Stroke Foundation here today. But the reality is that I'm trying to put a point across. Maybe you can lobby this government so they can listen to what I'm trying to say. Let's not put an 8% tax on everything. Let's in fact give tax credits for people to join clubs and get memberships to sports organizations, so they can live healthier and eat healthier and not have heart disease.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm pleased to rise today to speak about Heart Month—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member from Simcoe North, I would ask that you withdraw the comment.

1330

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Merci, monsieur le Président. It is my pleasure to rise today in this House to speak about Heart Month.

It certainly was nice to hear from the Minister of Health Promotion, and I, for one, wish we could hear her more.

I acknowledge the excellent work of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, health care practitioners, anti-poverty groups, health centres and, of course, individual Ontarians who are all working to lower the incidence of heart disease in this province.

Heart health remains a serious issue across Ontario. We know that every seven minutes, a Canadian dies from a stroke or heart attack. Yes, we have made great progress over the years through research and education, but there's much more to be done.

Studies tell us that cardiovascular disease is unevenly affecting people across the province. We know that in northern Ontario—the constituents I represent—we have a rate of heart disease that is 50% higher than the rest of Ontario, or the people living in the west-central or east-central parts of this province. We also know that Ontarians receiving social assistance have three times the rate of heart disease than people who are not receiving assistance or are of higher incomes. Our First Nations communities also have double the rate of heart disease than people who are not from First Nations. Those differences speak volumes.

The World Health Organization tells us that 90% of type 2 diabetes and 80% of coronary heart disease could be avoided altogether with simple things like good nutrition, regular exercise, elimination of smoking and stress management. We clearly need to understand the role of prevention in heart health and the impact of the social determinants of health. The above statistics should be a wake-up call, if we still needed one. We need to connect the dots between these factors and heart health.

Let us ask for a moment what we are doing here in Ontario to minimize those risks. Have we succeeded in investing in health promotion and disease prevention? The answer is, not really. Are we doing what we can to discourage the use of tobacco? I don't think so. Are we doing enough to support Ontarians to have access to healthy food? Here again, I don't think so. And we still do not have in place proper income supports like a strong anti-poverty strategy—something that would have a tremendous impact on heart health.

But we have the opportunity to bring solutions to the table today. The good news is that the government could take simple steps by bringing forward two private

members' bills that have received the support of this House and are now kind of sitting in limbo. The first is Bill 124, the cigarillo bill, which was co-sponsored by the member from Brant and myself. The second is Bill 156, the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act. Those two bills don't cost the government a cent, but they would help curb this epidemic of heart disease.

In December, 14 months ago, this House voted in favour of Bill 124 to ban the sale of individually sold candy-flavoured cigarillos, which are very popular among young smokers and basically are addicting the next generation of smokers. I was there when it received royal assent—I attended the ceremony—yet the Minister of Health Promotion has failed to this day to enact this law. So any kid with a buck in his pocket can get addicted for life.

Legislators voted in favour of Bill 156, the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act, to force the big chains to post the number of calories on their menus and decrease trans fats in restaurant food. This bill sits in limbo.

On this day, in this month, let us take our responsibility of lowering the incidence of heart disease seriously, get proactive and bring forward these important steps that represent the best opportunity to lower heart disease.

Ça me fait plaisir, monsieur le Président, de célébrer le mois de mars, qui est le mois des maladies cardiaques. On sait tous qu'avec une saine alimentation, une vie active et sans fumée, un poids santé et le contrôle du stress, on peut réduire le risque de maladies cardiaques pour tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes et nous permettre de vivre une vie plus longue et en santé.

PETITIONS

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the Rugby Women's Institute for sending this petition to me.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in 2008-09, the Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County ... served 4,356 families and 10,890 children and also conducted 3,159 protection investigations; and

"Whereas the CAS currently has 399 children in their care; and

"Whereas in July 2009 the McGuinty government cut funding to the Simcoe county CAS by 10.4% this" fiscal "year, which is \$5.6 million less than the amount the CAS requires to operate; and

"Whereas, beginning in February 2010, the CAS will have exhausted all of its cash flow allocations, including a \$2-million line of credit, and is now facing decisions on which bills it can now pay, including consideration of payments to the 174 foster homes which have children in their care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Premier Dalton McGuinty should immediately review the situation at the Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County and ensure that the province provides for families and children who need critical government support to protect children and families from harm."

I agree with this petition and will sign it.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Timiskaming-Cochrane, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients under conditions ...; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks' table with page Rachael.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition that's addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I have a few people to thank and acknowledge: the Peel Poverty Action Group, headed by Edna Toth; and particularly Elsie Thompson of Swanhurst Boulevard, who gathered the signatures; and Annie and Mary Giantone, who were kind enough, among others, to have signed it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita social service funding of other Ontario communities; and

"Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region service providers ...; and

"Whereas Ontario's Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population

growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

"That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

"That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario's award-winning Places to Grow strategy."

It's an excellent petition. I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of it and to ask page Quinton to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's another harmonized sales tax petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Simcoe North do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over \$400,000; and

"Whereas the ... blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I'm pleased to sign it and give it to Anthony to present to the table.

1340

CEMETERIES

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition that's addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. On behalf of my seatmate, the very hard-working member for Niagara Falls, I'd like to read it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

On behalf of the member from Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to present this petition and to ask page Julia to carry it for me.

ELMVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Elmvale District High School is an important part of the community of Elmvale and surrounding area; and

"Whereas the school is widely recognized as having high educational requirements and is well known for producing exceptional graduates who have gone on to work as professionals in health care, agriculture, community safety, the trades and many other fields that give back to the community; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised during the 2007 election that he would keep rural schools open when he declared that 'Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them'; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty found \$12 million to keep school swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn't found any money to keep an actual rural school open in Elmvale;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Education support the citizens of Elmvale and flow funding to the local school board so that Elmvale District High School can remain open to serve the vibrant community of Elmvale and surrounding area."

I agree with this petition and will sign it.

CEMETERIES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition here that was collected by the member for Niagara Falls. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's cemeteries are an important part of our cultural heritage, and Ontario's inactive cemeteries are constantly at risk of closure and removal; and

"Ontario's cemeteries are an irreplaceable part of the province's cultural heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government must pass Bill 149, the Inactive Cemeteries Protection Act, 2009, to prohibit the relocation of inactive cemeteries in the province of Ontario."

I agree with this. I'll affix my signature and give it to page Amy to carry to the table.

HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Waubaushene in the township of Tay has two entrances off Highway 400, one of which is the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp; and

"Whereas the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp entrance has had numerous accidents, including fatalities, over the past two decades; and

"Whereas the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp entrance is very confusing and awkward for drivers trying to make left-hand turns onto Highway 12 from either Pine Street or the Highway 400 ramp; and

"Whereas the Tay community policing committee and the council of the township of Tay have expressed grave concerns over the safety at the Pine Street-Highway 400 and Highway 12 intersection; and

"Whereas there is a strong feeling in the community that traffic lights at the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp and Highway 12 intersection would save lives;

"Therefore we petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario support the Tay community policing committee and the council of the township of Tay and immediately install traffic lights at the Pine Street-Highway 400 ramp and Highway 12 intersection."

I'm pleased to sign my name to this and present it to Matthew to present to the table.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of the member for Niagara Falls, who has collected a number of these petitions from residents in downtown Ottawa—the man gets around—I'm pleased to read this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by MPP Kim Craitor.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents;" and it goes on, Speaker, and concludes:

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to send it to the table with page Brady.

TAXATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "Whereas residents in Simcoe North do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that

will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over \$400,000; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax ... will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I'm pleased to sign that and give it to Julian to present to the table.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

BRITISH HOME CHILD DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE JOUR DES PETITS IMMIGRÉS BRITANNIQUES

Mr. Brownell moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 241, An Act to proclaim British Home Child Day / Projet de loi 241, Loi proclamant le Jour des petits immigrants britanniques.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Brownell has moved second reading of Bill 241. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill 241, an act to proclaim September 28 in each year as British Home Child Day, and to share with my colleagues a story that few Canadians know anything about. It is a story about courage, strength and perseverance. It is a story of Canada's and Ontario's British home children.

Between 1869 and 1939, about 100,000 children were sent to Canada from Great Britain, many of them to work as farm labourers and domestics in homes in Ontario and across Canada. These were the British home children, boys and girls anywhere from six months to 18 years of age. They were part of the child immigration movement. Most of them came from orphanages or other institutions, such as the Maryhill Industrial School in Glasgow, Scotland.

For a variety of reasons, the children were sent to Canada, and particularly Ontario, as we were a growing economy and in need of labourers. Officials believed these children would be better off in a new land with fresh air and wide open spaces.

Most of the children were transported by British religious and charitable organizations. For the most part, these organizations believed that they were doing a good and noble thing for the children, who were worse off living in poverty in Great Britain.

In reflecting on the home children of Ontario, we think about the work of Dr. Thomas John Barnardo, the energetic founder of the Barnardo's Homes that placed 30,000 children in Ontario. Hazelbrae in Peterborough, Ontario, was Dr. Barnardo's receiving home for girls. We think of the indomitable Maria Rye, who brought the first group of British children to Canada in 1869 and housed them in a refurbished jail near Niagara-on-the-Lake.

We remember Annie Macpherson's Home, originally opened in Galt, Ontario, in 1871, then moved to Stratford, Ontario, in 1883. Sending some 200 children to Canada each year, she came to Canada every summer to visit her children personally. James Fegan was the founder of Mr. Fegan's Homes for Boys in North Buckinghamshire, England, and in other communities throughout England. He had a distributing centre at 295 George Street here in Toronto.

To my family, William Quarrier is remembered as the founder of the Orphan Homes of Scotland, having sent over 7,000 Scottish children to Canada from Quarriers Village at Bridge of Weir, just outside Glasgow, between 1871 and 1938. It was from Fairknowe Home, Quarrier's receiving house in Brockville, Ontario, that my grandmother, Mary Scott Pearson, and great-aunt, Margaret Scott Pearson, were sent out as domestics in Ontario.

This afternoon, I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislature Keith and June McKey. They are here in the east gallery. It was June's mother, Christina Myles, who arrived in Canada as a home child in 1914, and her uncle, James Myles, arriving in 1915. They were sent from Quarrier's home in Scotland to the same home in Brockville, Fairknowe Home, that I alluded to previously.

1350

As for my grandmother, she was just 42 days shy of her 14th birthday when she arrived as an orphan at Halifax, Nova Scotia, aboard the SS Hibernian on September 28, 1891. After spending some time in Cottage 10 in Quarriers Village, her sister Maggie departed from Greenock, Scotland, aboard the SS Pomeranian in 1894. Fortunately for these two young orphans, they were to be reunited in eastern Ontario before Maggie departed with her husband to homestead in Manitoba.

The story of the British home children is one of challenge, determination and perseverance. Many home children faced adversity. Most were able to overcome it, but it was by no means easy. The British home children faced considerable challenges and some experienced tremendous hardship. They were susceptible to mistreatment because their living conditions were not closely monitored.

Arriving in Ontario with their worldly possessions tucked into little wooden trunks, siblings were often separated upon their arrival and many never saw each other again. This is an important part of the story that deserves to be told.

Their story does not end there. Due to their remarkable courage, strength and perseverance, Canada's British home children did endure, and most of them went on to lead healthy and productive lives and contribute immeasurably to the development of Ontario.

While the British home children were underprivileged and suffered from unfortunate circumstances, they endured and almost all of them who came to Canada remained in Canada and, indeed, in Ontario. They grew up to raise families of their own. They contributed to our country's economic growth and prosperity. They helped to cultivate our country's values and defend our country's freedom. More than 10,000 of them fought for Canada in the First and Second World Wars.

In the gallery today, I'm pleased to welcome Sandy Drysdale and his wife, Victoria. Sandy's father, James, was orphaned at the age of 12 when his mother, Susan, a farm worker in the southwest corner of Scotland, died of rheumatic fever in 1926. Of the five orphaned children, the three boys went to Quarrier's home at Bridge of Weir and the two girls went to live with one of their aunts.

In a message to me from Sandy Drysdale, I quote: "My father made the choice to come to Canada and was one of the last groups of British home children to come to Canada. He served in World War II with the Royal Canadian Artillery and, upon the end of the war, returned to Canada to work and contribute to the country we enjoy today."

As well, I welcome Sandra Joyce. Her dad, Robert Joyce, came over to Canada from Quarrier's home in 1925. He was 15 and his brother was 12. Robert worked on farms in the Brockville and Smiths Falls areas, but at the age of 20 he made his way to Toronto, where he enlisted in the Canadian Army and was stationed in both North Africa and Italy in World War II. So those are contributions that they certainly made for our country's freedom.

Canada's British home children are part of our country's history. They are part of our heritage. They represent a part of our past and their descendants represent a part of our future. Their stories are ones that need to be taught in our schools.

In her book *Quarrier's Story*, Anna Magnusson recalls the words of Beth Bruder, whose mother, Catherine McCallum, came to Canada from Quarriers Village at Bridge of Weir. I'm certainly delighted to welcome Beth Bruder in the gallery here today, and I quote Beth's words to Anna Magnusson: "We must remove the stigma that so many children felt in coming to Canada as home children, and we must move to emphasize the positive contribution the children made to Canada."

Today, it is estimated that 12% of Canada's population is made up of British home children and their descendants. That represents more than four million Canadians, and the number continues to grow. Yet, there are many Canadians who still do not know the story of the home children. They are not aware of the hardships that they suffered and the sacrifices that were made. They are not aware of the tremendous contributions that British

home children made to the social and economic fibre of our great province

Many Ontarians are not familiar with the story of acceptance, the desire for home children to be accepted into families and lives of Ontarians. In the epilogue to Kenneth Bagnall's book, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada*, the spirit of acceptance is told. Following the death of Frank McLean of Appin, Ontario, the funeral was held on a terribly cold January day, a few kilometres west of the village of Melbourne, Ontario. Among the pallbearers was a man who became like a son to McLean, Albert Wayling. He was an orphan from Britain, having been placed in Dr. Barnardo's Homes and then sent to Canada.

In heart-wrenching words, Bagnall writes about this orphan boy, now grown into a man: "Now, on this day that was personal and final, he was there because he was a son. Even the affections of the McLeans, so full and sincere, were not always able to dispel his feelings that he was, at times, an outsider. Perhaps Frank McLean sensed that. For on that cold day outside the Baptist church, standing within a family's grieving circle and sharing his sorrow, Albert Wayling, the Barnardo boy, found himself at last where he longed to be."

We, as members of provincial Parliament, have the opportunity to change that lack of knowledge about the contributions to Ontario by the British home children. We can help tell their story. We can proclaim September 28 the day of the British home child in the province of Ontario. We can give Ontarians an opportunity to learn about their past and to collectively recognize the contributions of Ontario's British home children and their descendants.

This year, Canada Post will issue a stamp commemorating home children. As well, the federal government has proclaimed 2010 as the year of the British home child. As I stand in the House today, I certainly encourage all my colleagues in this House to support this bill. In September 2009, I had the great opportunity of travelling to Glasgow, Scotland, to walk in the footsteps of my grandmother and my great-aunt, who were orphans and who were sent, as you heard, to Canada as very, very young—well, my grandmother was not even a teenager yet.

I have to say that the travels I did in Scotland were certainly travels of discovery, travels to hear the story of determination, first of all, and then of perseverance—perseverance with living in the village where, obviously, they were loved and accepted into a community, but then acceptance into Ontario by the communities. It was tough. We've heard stories of how very, very tough it was for these orphans who had been placed in Ontario and throughout Canada.

I think it's time, as we are seeing in Canada, and with Canada Post in recognizing the British home children, that we, as parliamentarians in this House, recognize September 28 as British Home Child Day. As the sponsor of this bill, September 28 is recognized as the day that my grandmother, 42 days shy of her 14th birthday—she

was in her early teens—set foot in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I do not know how she got to Ontario, but I certainly know that she was received at the Fairknowe Home and worked a very hard life in Ontario. I'm very proud to sponsor and support this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to rise today to support the bill that has been introduced by my colleague the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. I was quite moved by the personal story that he communicated to us and certainly the lives of these children. I will tell you that until the member brought this bill forward to designate September 28 of each year as British Home Child Day, I was not aware of the fact that these children had come from Britain between 1869 and the late 1940s and settled here in Canada—many of them in Ontario—how they got here and the ages of those children. So I'm very pleased to be able to support this bill. I trust it will be passed today. I'm pleased that the House of Commons in Ottawa has also passed, with unanimous consent, a private member's bill to recognize this year as the Year of the British Home Child, that Canada Post will be issuing a stamp to commemorate the home children, and that Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration plans to include recognition of their story in citizenship ceremonies.

1400

It is certainly a story that, listening to the member today, needs to be told. I think it's another indication of how this country has welcomed so many people from so many countries to our shores today, and it also speaks of the adversity that these children faced. But I think that the overwhelming message is that they overcame the adversity, they overcame the obstacles, they overcame the challenges, and they have had a significant impact on this country, certainly on the institutions and all that we hold so dear. They've contributed to our economy and made a difference in the lives of many people.

I have to tell you that when I took a look at this bill that was introduced by my colleague, I couldn't help but recognize that there are children in all parts of the world. And I recalled the story of my own father, who, shortly after World War I, having been born in Austria, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was left with a father who had been killed during the war and a mother who developed tuberculosis and died. He and his sister were sent to an orphanage in southern Austria. But at that time, there were many, many orphans in Austria as well, and it was decided that these young children would be shipped by cattle cart to Holland. They would work there in much the same way as many of these children did, as labourers in the field, milking the cows. And so, when my dad was seven, he and his sister, who was just a few years older, arrived in Holland. They arrived to work for this farmer and his wife and their children.

You write here about the fact that many of these children felt loneliness and sadness, and I still remember that about my dad at times, that there was a loneliness

and sadness in having been separated from all of your family in Austria. In fact, I will tell you, I've tried to trace our family, but I can't find my roots. I've gone back and we've looked and we can't find them. He was never able to find them, either.

He married my mother, who was Dutch, and they came to Canada in 1951. I would say that that was where my father did find happiness. Living in Canada, we were accepted, just as these children were accepted. They worked hard and, just as these children showed remarkable determination, courage and strength and overcame the obstacles, I would say to you that so did my father.

I saw similarity here, because even today, there are many children who are orphans. Sometimes people are motivated and they think, "Well, maybe if we send these people elsewhere, to another country, it's going to be in their best interest." But I don't think we always take into consideration the consequences of uprooting these children from their roots and their extended families. And children are very resilient, as these children were.

If I take a look at what it is we are proposing to do today, I think in many ways we are not only recognizing these children from Britain who came to this country, but children from all over the world who have been sent to different countries, continuing to today. Look at how so many well-meaning people today think we should uproot the children of Haiti and take them to other countries. Then we stop and ask ourselves: Is that really in the best interests of those children if they still have family there, if that is their country? We have to hesitate and we have to think. So I applaud Mr. Brownell for bringing forward this bill today. I am certainly going to support him.

I just want to congratulate the people in the audience here today who obviously have a history of which they can be proud and have demonstrated courage, resilience and strength. I thank you and I thank those who came before you for the outstanding contribution you've made to Canada. It's our diversity that strengthens us. Your being here, I think, makes this bill real and alive for all of us today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Right off the top, I want to say that of course I'm going to support this bill. I think it's an important initiative. Quite frankly, I didn't know much about this issue at all until I did the research for this bill. I was also absolutely shocked and appalled by this piece of our history. For those who are watching and listening at home, know this: 100,000 children, some as young as four years old, were sent from Great Britain to be indentured servants to do mainly agricultural work, but also to work as servants in homes. Children—child labourers. This went on in Canada until after the war, but it went on until the 1970s. Great Britain was still shipping children out as indentured servants to South Africa and Australia. What I found particularly shocking is that I didn't know about this, and I wondered how many Canadians know about this part of their heritage.

You heard Mr. Brownell say that almost 12% of Canadians are descendants from these little children. I'm

a parent. Can you even begin to imagine a four-year-old getting on a boat and arriving in a stranger's house? One of them described being put with the dogs in a shed and having to eat with the dogs. Another described having to walk to school without shoes. The fact that there was abuse goes without saying. In fact, the estimate of the abuse that happened to these children is as high as two thirds, and is probably realistically much higher.

They were indentured servants; they worked as child labourers. That is not to say that many of the agencies that sent them from Great Britain had, for the time, the best of intentions. They were sending them away from poverty in many instances, but not all. Some of them were sent simply because they were frightened of them growing up in the wrong religion, and some of them—in fact, most of them—were literally sent without permission from their parents, and completely legally so. They were sent, remember, to a foreign country, Canada, where they had no citizenship, no identity, where they had no contact with their parents or grandparents and had to reinvent their histories after they grew up. This is unbelievable. I am shocked that I didn't know this.

Beyond just a day set aside, what I hope comes out of this discussion today is a beginning of a redress, and from the federal government as well. This should be taught in our schools. I see a school here. You should be learning about this: 100,000 children—maybe some of your ancestors—came over as indentured servants working for people, without any identity. Think "slavery." That happened here, and it happened with British children.

When we set the stage to look at what they were escaping from in Britain, of course, that's not pretty either. We should all be aware that in Victorian England, there were no laws of any kind to protect children. Child labour was rife. This is the period we read about in Dickens. This was a period when little children would go to work in factories, they would start before the light came up and come home at 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock at night. In fact, you can read transcripts of the House of Commons in Britain at the time when they began to look at the issue of child labour, and they are terrifying. Remember, we're talking about six-year-olds, sometimes four-year-olds, going to work.

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In one, I read of a carding manufacturing plant where the dust was so thick that one child could not see the child next to them and inhaled that dust 12 hours a day. They had 40 minutes for lunch. They were fed the same food that the pigs were fed, and if they didn't eat it, it was fed to the pigs. This particular individual who testified before the House of Commons committee, in those days just before the turn of the century, developed incredible health problems by the age of 13, as you can imagine, and ended up in the poorhouse. Even the poorhouses were a step forward for children who did child labour.

It's interesting, but anybody out there who thinks that libertarianism sounds cool, anybody out there who

questions the role and necessity of a government that stands up for social services, that stands up for labour legislation, that stands up for the right to unionize—anybody who questions that—should read about the reality of life in Victorian England, because that's what unfettered capitalism looks like, my friends. It looks like that. It looks like children going to work in factories at the crack of dawn and working there for 12 hours a day. It looks like no health care; that's why some of the children were shipped over too. That's what it looks like. It looks like children starving to death on the streets of London—that's what it looks like—and coming to work in Canada, South Africa and Australia as virtual slaves. That's what it looks like when you don't have a government that stands up for the rights of its citizens, particularly its children.

I absolutely commend our visitors today. "Courage" has been used as a word to describe them. The courage to tell one's own history is courage indeed. The only way we change history is when we tell the truth about what happened in our history. Thank you so much for standing up and enlightening all of us, and hopefully all of Ontario, by being here, being present and letting this history be known.

Of course—the courage—we want to emphasize the positive. These little children went on, against all adversity, to be contributing members—founding members in many instances—of the country we know as Canada and of Ontario, our province. These were the children who did the work that made this country and made this province—it's frightening to even say that—the children who did the work that made this province and made this country. It's absolutely shocking.

It's fascinating to me. I am, as we all are if we're not First Nations people, in some way, shape or form the descendant of immigrants. I know that the immigrants in my family, like all immigrants, had a struggle when they first came over. On my British side, they went out and homesteaded on the prairies. On my Italian side, they escaped poverty and starvation in Sicily and came over to be small business owners. But none of my history compares to your history. None of my history compares to the descendants who would speak about their grandparents coming over as indentured servants. The only corollary I can think of—it's true in our country too, but certainly to the south—is the descendants of slaves.

Did I know about this? Again, I can't express enough my absolute shock at discovering this part of our history. Thank goodness the federal government has recognized this and has shone a light on it. Thank goodness the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has recognized this and shone a light on it so that all of us can be educated about this quintessential part of our history to honour those and their descendants, because certainly, they deserve honour.

I am still flabbergasted, and I hope there are educators watching, because I hope it becomes part of the curriculum of our schools to tell this story. This is a phenomenal story. It's a story that needs to be shouted from the

rooftops in Canada, that we know that at least one in 10 Canadians comes from this. Also, it's a story that needs to be told because in an era of cutbacks and recession, we have to recommit ourselves—all of us—to the rights of the child, to the rights of workers, to the medicare system that we have, to a well-funded educational system, because that's what separates us from the reality these children faced.

The reality that these children faced, and our reality, was changed by government. It was changed by organized labour. It was changed by a number of people who took a number of risks on behalf of those who could not speak for themselves. So in honouring these children, I'd like to honour all of those people, from a diversity of political backgrounds, who really laid the foundations for what is a far more civilized society than these children faced.

Absolutely, I'll support it. Thank you for the opportunity to discover part of my past, part of all Canadians' pasts. Hopefully, because we know our history, we will not repeat it. Hopefully we'll move on, and hopefully we'll let others know about this incredible, shocking and yet heroic story.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I too want to join the members who have just spoken and begin by expressing my support for the bill being brought forward by the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

This is one of these rare opportunities—for those of our visitors here—that we really get to debate, to listen carefully and to speak to things we know little or nothing of.

I think you've heard it said already by the other members, and I will just reiterate those comments, that except for Mr. Brownell's efforts, this is something that wouldn't have been in my world. It wouldn't have been something that I would have known of. Save and except for this place, it's probably something that never would necessarily have crossed what I would have done in my life. So I want to thank him for bringing forward the bill and to comment as well on the work that he does here in the context of Ontario's history when he speaks to motions, when he speaks to bills—things like the bill he had on the gravesites of Premiers and the work he did in that regard to recognize Premiers in this province who have passed away and whose gravesites were unmarked, and we knew not where they were. It's the type of work that Mr. Brownell does, and I think he has done it again in this instance.

I want to speak briefly. I was sitting here a few minutes ago looking at the faces—and you wouldn't be able to see them from the gallery here; and in the members' gallery, your guests who are here today would not as well. But I was looking at a group of young people who left just not long ago, from a class that was here, and I was thinking about what they must have been thinking about as the speeches from the members opposite were being given, as they thought about their own circum-

stances. These, in many ways, are the new faces of Canada, if I can be so bold as to call them that. I was thinking about what they must have been thinking about their lives, how they may have arrived in Canada, or in Ontario, if they weren't native to Ontario, as the case might be, and hearing about children as being referenced in servitude in this province not so long ago; how they reflected on their own lives and on the history of this place that they have an opportunity to sit in today, and listen to their parliamentarians and legislators speak about the history of others in this province.

It's interesting not just because of the situation these children found themselves in, not because of the struggles they found, the life they found and the province and country they helped to build, but it's interesting to have young people in this place who have a chance to participate in this very real way in what this province has been and continues to be about.

It also drives home, probably, for many of us in this room a bit of our own history, as we were each speaking to this point. My own background is one where I was born in Saint John, New Brunswick. My grandparents were coal miners out of Nova Scotia. Beyond that, their history is questionable to me from first arriving in this country, but they were the salt of the earth, and under the earth in that instance, in working hard to provide for their families. Certainly they didn't arrive in this country, grow in this country, with any silver spoon in their mouths, but they raised their children in multitudes, as was the form of the day. My mother had five brothers and sisters, all of whom ended up moving to Ontario following a very significant mine disaster—two mine disasters—in the late part of the 1950s in Springhill, Nova Scotia. My mother started the transition from the East Coast to Ontario to provide a better life for her family: for myself, her and then subsequently the others.

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So it drives me to think about my own history because most of these children would have travelled to the East Coast by boat, landed in Halifax or elsewhere, travelled from there through the Maritimes to Ontario and elsewhere and struggled, as was said, merely to survive to build a future for themselves. It gives me—and each of us—a chance to think a little bit about my own heritage and history in this country and the struggles that my parents and grandparents went through to provide for what I have today, what my children have and now what my grandchildren have the opportunity to experience. It was the work these British home children did, in this case, struggling to make a better life for themselves and ultimately for their families—with the recognition of how they wanted to make this a better place for their families, children and ultimately their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

This, I think, is an important piece of legislation that Mr. Brownell has introduced here today. I'm going to be very happy to support the bill when we get to the vote, when the time comes, for a great variety of reasons. For one, because it's important to do. It's important to

recognize, in many instances, our history in this province. This is just one example of many that we've had the opportunity to debate, but an important one; one that most, if not all, of us would have acquired very little knowledge of along the way. It also builds the repertoire of diversity in this province—in the context of the histories of where we came from, of what we have lived through and the way that we've grown in this province—and our opportunities on a go-forward basis by reflecting on where we were.

We speak of hundreds of thousands of children coming from a place that was seen to be a poorer and worse place than where they were coming to, and we speak of the good intentions of those who assisted those children in providing a better life. In many cases, it wasn't necessarily a better life, but in the longer term I think that the vast majority of their descendants would say that it did prove, ultimately, to be a better life for those who came after. But it wasn't a few children; it was tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands over a long period of time, coming from orphanages and institutions that could no longer afford to take care of them and were looking for a means to provide for those children in a fashion that they no longer had the capacity to do. Looking to Canada—looking from afar. It's not as we know today, where we can fly across continents in a matter of hours.

But they saw it through a particular lens: as a land of real opportunity, a growing economy, a growing nation, an entrepreneurial spirit, opportunity that would abound in a vast land that spread from ocean to ocean. One can only imagine the magnitude of what they were considering for these children at that point in time—and how those children might be able to contribute. Their families contributed to the economy of a growing and new country that was just gaining its legs in the world. To think that some 12% of Canada's population is now in some way made up of or related to the British home children becomes significant in the context of the base population of this country.

I note as well that Canada Post will be issuing a stamp commemorating home children this year. What better way to help commemorate, just in a small way throughout the country, than by providing that opportunity on a stamp that would be available throughout this country.

I want to thank Mr. Brownell for bringing forward the bill. I'm pleased to be able to speak to it and will be very happy to support it when the time comes for a vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to join in what apparently is a chorus of support for Mr. Brownell's bill. I've worked closely with Mr. Brownell: He was my PA when I was the Minister of Consumer Services. I know of his interest in history and—not just his interest in history, but his interest in social justice as well. Mr. Brownell, thank you for sharing this with us.

I recently visited my homeland of Scotland this past summer and, being aware of the story, did do some

travelling through Glasgow and elsewhere, hearing the story. It's a heart-wrenching story; it really is heart-wrenching. It lends some evidence to the old saying that every saint has a past and hopefully every sinner has a future. We lift ourselves up all too often as being the self-righteous country, the country that did everything right. We can point fingers at South Africa and talk about apartheid and we can point fingers elsewhere, but we turned away the St. Louis at one point in our history, and we welcomed—well, we didn't welcome necessarily, but we took kids who were essentially stolen from their own homes and brought here.

I hear that the British Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Gordon Brown, intends to proceed with an apology, and I think that's entirely appropriate. Our federal government might want to consider that, too, although they've taken some significant steps, which I think we all applaud, and that's good. It's particularly good following right on Family Day. We just celebrated Family Day here, and it's important that we tell our stories, because we all have a story to tell. It's important that we be forever vigilant in ensuring that our kids know that story, that we take the time to tell them the story, not just all the good parts—that's easy—but the truth. It's absolutely essential that we do that, that we help our citizens from whatever background to examine and to celebrate their roots.

The British home children came, and we should say, "Welcome to Canada." I don't know if anybody ever said that: "Welcome to Canada." We want to say, "Thank you very much for the contributions that were made." In hindsight, we do what is often so comfortable to do, but—with a degree of sincerity that I think will be reflected soon in this place—we acknowledge that there were some wrongs that were done along the way.

But notwithstanding that adversity and notwithstanding whatever mistreatment was there, the British home children somehow rose above that—remarkably, magically almost—to make a contribution to this country that ought to be recorded in the annals of our history and will be recorded in the annals of our history and the history of their kids and their grandkids, so that they can continue to make that contribution down the way.

Welcome. I'll support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Brownell, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Jim Brownell: First of all, I'd like to thank the members from Kitchener–Waterloo, Parkdale–High Park, Pickering–Scarborough East and Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for their support and words in support of this bill today.

I am certainly very proud and happy, too, to have some of my Canadian Quarrier family friends, friends that I made in Scotland, with me today. I met them here in Toronto at the airport and we flew over to Scotland and had a wonderful time there in September. From left to right: Victoria, Sandy, Beth, Sandra, June and Keith. Thank you so much for coming here today as descend-

ants, as family members, to hear this story, a story that we heard from all sides, a story that hasn't been really told in our history books. I don't know if the students are still up there, but this is, as a retired teacher, a story that was not told in our history books, and I really think it is important.

We heard this afternoon stories of courage, determination, perseverance, and we heard the word "honour." I think that with this bill, we're doing just that. Just as the federal government proclaimed this year as the Year of the British Home Child, just as Canada Post is doing with the stamp, we here in the Parliament of Ontario, in this House, can certainly open a page of the new history book. I hope that in the new history book we do have this story told, the story of these young orphans who, with just a little wooden trunk—the little wooden trunk that my grandmother brought to Ontario is now out in British Columbia but it's still around, and in that little wooden trunk was her story.

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I thank all those who supported the bill here this afternoon and I want to say that I look forward to this becoming proclaimed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): For those who are visiting us today in the galleries and those watching at home, we'll vote on this ballot item in about 100 minutes.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I move that, in the opinion of this House, bullying is never acceptable, whether it be physical, verbal, social or cyberbullying, and that the government of Ontario should take all steps possible to prevent bullying, including:

—officially recognizing the third week of each November as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week in Ontario; and

—having every safe-school team in the province direct the development of activities for their school during Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm certainly pleased to rise today to speak to the resolution to make our schools safer for our students and our teachers, and also to ensure that we take every step possible to raise awareness and to prevent bullying.

Many people have asked me why I introduced this private member's resolution. This happened because last fall I was approached by parents, students and teachers who were very concerned about some of the personal experiences that had occurred to them. They were concerned about the impact of bullying on themselves and on their families and the fact that we didn't seem to be seeing any decrease in the number of incidents. I committed to them that I would research the subject, I would do a consultation, and I would embark on an

initiative to try to make sure that we can make our schools safer for our children in order that they can learn. That's why we have the private member's resolution here today.

I'm very thankful for the number of people who came forward today. We have parents here who joined me at the press conference. We had students and teachers and we had community partners. Certainly, everybody is committed to doing what they can to lift what is almost like a veil over bullying. There has been a culture of silence, and I think that's why, by setting aside a week each year, we can raise the awareness of the fact that it is a serious issue and we need to make people aware of that.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has indicated that one in three students experiences bullying at school—an absolutely unbelievable number. Almost one in three students has bullied someone else. Another startling statistic is that between 2003 and 2007, the number of bullying cases remained about the same. We simply are not seeing a decrease in the number of situations within our schools.

Now, when we talk about bullying, we're talking about bullying that can be physical, that can be verbal, that can be social or, more recently now, we have cyberbullying. It doesn't matter what form; bullying is never acceptable. It hurts.

It's as a result of the people, the parents and the students, approaching me, it's as a result of the first-hand concerns and the reports that they brought to my attention, and it's as a result of the high statistics on bullying that we continue to see today and of the far-reaching consequences of bullying that I believe all of us in this House must make a concerted effort to stop the bullying. My resolution is intended to do so.

I have consulted extensively with educational stakeholders throughout the province of Ontario. I'm very pleased to have, within my press release today, a quote from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. Their president, Sam Hammond, says they lend support to my proposal "to have Ontario formally recognize bullying awareness and prevention week in an effort to focus greater attention on effective prevention strategies at the school level. Activities related to an annual focus on bullying awareness would naturally fit with the role of new safe school teams the Ministry of Education is requiring in ... school."

We also are supported by the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and their president, Paula Peroni, who have indicated that this week would be "a tangible activity" to make the fact that we want to create a safe, inclusive and caring learning environment for our students a reality.

We're supported by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and their president, James Ryan, who says that teachers know "how important it is for our students to feel safe and secure," and by formally recognizing this week we can help "to raise public awareness of this important issue."

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and their president, Kenneth Coran, also are very sup-

portive of this week and having the school teams set up. They say that "prevention of bullying is key to ensuring that all students feel safe" at our schools.

Today there were members in the audience and I just want to acknowledge the fact that they were here. We heard from Katie Neu, a young woman, 18, from Listowel, who was bullied from the time she was in kindergarten. Finally, in grade 9, she couldn't take it any longer and she made the decision to leave school, got her diploma, her certificate online, and is now doing all she can to support other young people who have been bullied, because personally she found no one who could support her through this very difficult period of her life.

Here today as well was Sunnie McFadden-Curtis, whose son was bullied. Certainly, her family has gone through a nightmare and she's now focused on bringing it all to life in a documentary.

We had here today, from the Bluewater Citizens for Education, Lesa McDougall, and Karen Sebben. Again, these are families who have experienced bullying of their children and see this resolution today as an important first step toward ensuring a vision for safe schools. They indicate our children cannot learn if they do not feel safe.

What happens to children who are bullied? It's quite frightening. If you take a look at the research, you can see that those children who have been bullied may suffer from anxiety, depression, substance abuse and low self-esteem, and experience academic failure. Also, these students, in a few cases, go on to commit suicide because they feel nobody, but nobody, understands them or can help them. Many of these children—after listening to the parents and the children themselves—have been forced to leave their school, go to another school, perhaps in another community. Some have entered the private school system where they've had to pay for the price of going to school. It's really quite remarkable that, in this day and age, anyone would have to leave a school and move elsewhere to receive their education simply because we haven't been able to deal effectively with the whole issue of bullying.

Not only does the research show that the person bullied experiences problems, so does the person who is the bully. The bully is the one who well may use aggression as a form of power in the future and become an abusive adult—maybe spousal abuse, child abuse, elder abuse. It's also the adult who may become involved later in violent crime.

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We have to help those people, and we have to help those children who are being bullied. If we set aside one week a year, we can make sure we focus on effective prevention strategies. We can teach children how they can develop the tools to protect themselves against bullying, as well.

I want to read you a story from a nine-year-old boy that was sent to me by his grandmother when she learned I was going to be introducing this bill. Dawson Ladouceur from Kitchener says:

"The first reason I think kids bully is because they don't feel good about themselves or how they look, so

they hide it by bullying kids. This makes the bully feel more powerful and forget about his own problems.

"Another reason is that they are just plain mean. They might come from a house where the parents are unloving and abusive. This makes the child feel angry and upset and wanting to hurt someone else.

"Some children are not confident can be really scared and upset by what bullies do to them and won't want to go to school. But I am a confident kid. If I am wearing glasses and people say: 'Ha-ha, what nerdy glasses you have. You look like a nerd,' I will either ignore it or say that these are my glasses and you can't make me take them off so go away. I will then just walk away.

"Another reason kids bully is if they have been bullied themselves. They will feel mad and helpless so then they will try bullying on another child. Also if a kid is constantly bullied and feels they aren't getting any help from the teachers, they bring a small weapon (i.e. a small pocket knife) to school to make them feel confident and safe."

He concludes by saying, "That's why I think it's important for schools to help make the students feel safe and put a stop to bullies."

That's from a nine-year-old in Kitchener.

Yes, bullying is a very, very serious issue. It impacts not only the students who have been bullied, it impacts the students who do the bullying and all of the witnesses in that school. It impacts the teachers and the principal. It impacts the parents, and it impacts the whole community. So we need to make sure that by setting aside this annual week where we can raise the awareness and focus on prevention and make sure that the safe school teams are set up in every school in the province of Ontario and they can direct the activities, we do what we can to lift the culture of silence.

Bullying is there. Bullying isn't going to go away. Yes, we have new legislation, and this resolution that I've introduced is complementary to the legislation.

But I tell you, folks, I heard today from more families who support this resolution. One of them was Myles Neuts's father. If you remember, in 1998, 10-year-old Myles Neuts was found hanging on a coat hook in the washroom of his school and he never came home again. That was in Chatham, Ontario. Today, when his father spoke to Marie in my office, the pain that he experienced 12 years ago was evident in his voice. His message is that bullying, whatever the situation, is wrong; people get hurt; people die; it must stop, and it's up to everyone in the community to stop it.

I hope you'll support our bill and stop the bullying.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to commend my colleague Ms. Witmer for bringing this bill forward. I wholeheartedly support this, as I expect all members of the Legislature will.

I first raised the issue of bullying in this House on June 11, 2008. That was motivated by an experience in my own riding. A six-year-old student was assaulted in a

washroom by two 13-year-old students. At that point in time, the frustration the parents experienced—not even to begin to enter into the intimidation and the pain that was felt by the grade 1 student. The frustration at that time that was experienced by the parents was that there seemed to be no response from the school. The issue continued to be minimized by the teacher and the principal, as well as by the school board.

I was frustrated at that time because the then Minister of Education refused as well to address this issue, which is why I put the question to the Premier on that occasion and asked the Premier to intervene and to direct the Minister of Education to investigate. To his credit, on that day the Premier stated very clearly that he shared my concern, our collective concern, and would in fact direct the Minister of Education to move forward to investigate and to do something positively about this issue of bullying.

We're now some two years later on, and yes, as my colleague indicated, there was legislation introduced. But unfortunately, as I was listening to the press conference this morning hosted by my colleague, I heard the concern expressed during that press conference by Lesa McDougall, who represented the Bluewater Citizens for Education. In response to a very direct question as to what she felt the real concern was and whether this legislation that was passed will address the issue, she responded with these words: "The discretion of principals contained in that legislation is not acceptable." I believe that the bill that's before us is extremely important because it will do as my colleague indicates: It will help to raise the awareness of this issue, not only on the part of the student body, but on the part of teachers and principals, and hopefully board members as well.

Something that was very disturbing to me, as I was dealing with the issue in York region, was a letter that I received from the parent of this grade 1 student. She said the following, in response to a letter that she received from the school board: that the letter "only reinforces the efforts made by the school and board to downplay and conceal the assault and the mishandling of it under their direction."

The concern is that we can have all of the legislation that we want; as long as we don't make it very clear that there is in fact a responsibility on the part of those individuals entrusted with the care and protection of our children while they're attending the schools to report—not at their discretion, but to make it mandatory for them to report any bullying to the parents and, yes, to the authorities. Because only then can we be assured that these matters will be dealt with in a responsible way.

I would therefore appeal to the current Minister of Education, not only to obviously support the bill before us and to ensure that, while this bill will be passed—I have no doubt—unanimously by this Legislature for second reading, it will then receive third reading and will in fact be put in place by the government; but in addition to that, to take the necessary steps to make amendment to Bill 157 to ensure that reporting is in fact made

mandatory and not left at the discretion of the principals. Because I believe that even principals would want to ensure that they are under the legislated responsibility to report, not to have it left to their discretion.

Finally—and I'll close with this—we heard and have heard repeatedly from the principals' council of this province that one of the major concerns is the level of supervision within our schools and the lack of funding for supervision within schools and on school property. We can pass legislation. We can pass this bill. We can raise awareness. But if we don't provide the tools, the resources and the personnel within our schools and on our school properties that will allow the necessary supervision to take place, all will be for naught. At the end of the day, we have to raise awareness of this important issue, but we also have to ensure that those we expect to be responsible for the safety of our children have the appropriate resources to deal with it.

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I want to thank my colleague Ms. Witmer for taking this initiative and for being available to parents and educators, to listen to them and to bring this forward and give this province-wide awareness. We trust that this is an important step to resolving this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on a very important issue, which is brought by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo.

First of all, right at the outset, I want to say that I will be supporting this motion because of the importance of the issue around anti-bullying.

I think we know the impact bullying can have on our children in our schools. Our schools are supposed to be a safe environment, a healthy environment, an environment for our children where they can learn and get education. This is not an environment where our children should be stigmatized, harassed, threatened, hurt, injured or anything of that sort. We obviously, as a community, as individuals in our community and as members of the Legislature, need to do everything in our power to ensure that bullying does not take place in school and that our children in our schools are not impacted by that.

I think it would be safe for me to say that all of us, as MPPs, have had instances of speaking with many constituents in our ridings who have brought issues that are ongoing in regard to their children. I had a few of those opportunities, unfortunately, in my riding of Ottawa Centre. In fact, I've spoken about this before in this Legislature. While in the last election campaign in 2007, I met a parent who asked me questions around bullying and my position on it because their daughter had gone through quite a traumatic series of events in their school. Shortly after I was elected, I approached those parents again so that I could work with them and ensure that they had the recourses available. Fortunately, at that time, I had the opportunity—and their circumstances are obviously quite horrific as to what their daughter went

through. Of course, I'm not going to mention names. For a young girl, the kind of instances of sexual exploitation she went through were extremely harrowing, I must say. It was disturbing to learn that that kind of behaviour took place in school and little action was taken.

Fortunately, at that time, the Safe Schools Action Team was engaged. The MPP from Guelph is the chair of that. I had the opportunity to sit down with her and learn about the scope of that action team, the kind of work they're doing, be able to then connect my constituent with the Safe Schools Action Team and be able to get my constituent's point of view to the team, and help shape some of the legislation that came through later to create the safe schools legislation to help make sure that we diminish the impact, to the extent we can, and hopefully one day totally eliminate bullying from our schools, because I think every student has the right to feel safe and to be safe in their school.

This is an important issue and an issue that is paramount to all of us. By having a week where we can raise awareness about bullying and how to prevent bullying—making sure that our school boards and our schools have the tools and resources to make that happen is extremely important.

I'm quite happy with the kinds of things we have legislated through the Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act, Bill 157, legislation that was passed by this House on June 1, 2009. The legislation now requires that school staff report serious student incidents to the principal, including bullying, that principals contact the parents of victims of such incidents, and that school staff respond to address inappropriate and disrespectful student behaviour; for example, racial and homophobic slurs. The act came into effect on February 1, 2010.

These things are really important because we want to make sure that our teachers, our principals and our staff act as quickly as possible when acts of bullying are brought to their attention. We need to make sure that victims, children in our schools, are protected from bullying and, of course, we need to make sure that there are active policies in place by which education is taking place and by which children, teachers, staff and others are being taught how to prevent bullying.

As I was preparing for this debate today, I got the opportunity to look at the bullying prevention and intervention policy of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. This is the school board, obviously, that's responsible for public schools in my community of Ottawa and my riding of Ottawa Centre. I was heartened to see that there is quite a vigorous policy that exists to ensure prevention of bullying and intervention in those circumstances. As I look at this motion, I think the kind of effort the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is making, for example, goes hand in hand.

Obviously, the board believes that bullying is a serious issue, with far-reaching consequences for both the entire school community and the community at large. It puts out steps by which bullying prevention and intervention programs should take place, consistent with a progressive discipline approach. They support the use of practices

that take into account the needs of individual students by showing sensitivity to diversity, cultural needs and special education needs, and they provide training to all administrators, teachers, occasional teachers and all support staff to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to address bullying and ensure that others are trained and made aware of the policy.

I think those types of policies need to be highlighted by the kind of awareness week that this motion by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has put forward. We need to make sure that there is time dedicated when we focus on measures against bullying. Of course, that exercise should be taking place every single day; we should not just be focused on one day or one week alone. But a week is important to highlight and accelerate our efforts.

I'm very happy to stand here and speak in support of this motion. I congratulate the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for bringing forward this very important issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I will be supporting the motion. Bullying is a serious issue. It has existed for a long time and it's likely to continue for a long time. There is no doubt about the destructive impacts of bullying on families and the individuals affected. There is no doubt about it, and we all know.

Bullying should not be confused with sexual abuse. They are two different issues. The four issues that I heard of parents who came to the committee when we discussed Bill 157 were matters of sexual abuse of children against children, young people against other young people. I have to tell you, I was hurt by the description of what happened and hurt by the lack of action by those who were entrusted to deal with these issues. From what I heard, the principals involved did not deal with it well, trustees who were contacted did not deal with it well, and it was a failure of the system, no doubt about it.

But as I hear some members comment about bullying and linking it up with sexual abuse—they are two different things, and they need to be addressed. The solutions are very similar. We have to talk about that. One week where we make people aware of bullying is a good idea. We involve students, we involve teachers, we presumably involve principals and superintendents and everyone in the system, including trustees. It's a good thing. It cannot hurt.

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I heard the member from Kitchener–Waterloo also talk about prevention. This is where I believe we need to go. It's really prevention that is lacking. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo talks about a culture of silence. In my view, it's a culture of inaction, not a culture of silence, because people are talking about it. The question is, what are we doing about bullying, sexual abuse and violence that is happening with students against students in our school system? We have reports that speak to what it is that we could be doing.

Before I get to that, I want to say that there was a previous regime here under the leadership of Mr. Harris

that attempted to deal with issues of violence in our schools and bullying, through a zero-tolerance policy. It failed. It does not work. It has never worked. While it might have made some politicians feel good, including making some teachers feel good about expelling students, it wasn't the answer, because when you expel the problem outside of the school, the problem still persists. The problem comes back into the school system, and they will repeat the same offences, if not different offences. The problem hasn't disappeared. We expelled thousands and thousands of students. The government was proud. It was a healthy record of expulsions. It was thousands. At one point, at peak, it was 14,000—at one point or another. That's a lot of pride that the previous government must have had about expelling students. The problem is, it didn't solve the issue. This government continued with that strategy for many, many years. I deplored it, because it wasn't the answer.

Eventually, this government introduced Bill 157 under the previous minister who is present in this Legislature. We now have mandatory reporting. In my view, that's not the answer. It's better than nothing, because it forces teachers and others to report incidents of bullying and abuse of any kind. That can be a good thing, but merely having a statistical number that says we've reported it doesn't solve the problem. It doesn't deal with the issues that Lesa this morning—or was it Katie, the young person who spoke this morning?—talked about getting at the root of the problem. Why is it that students do what they do? That's what Katie, the victim of bullying, was saying this morning. She talked about how she's been hurt, was hurt for years and years. She raises the question, "What do we do?" We have to understand why young people do what they do. But merely making reporting mandatory doesn't solve it. It simply gives us a statistical figure that we can be proud of, saying that we're now reporting, but it doesn't deal with the problem.

Now, some people conveniently and easily attack teachers. Some people conveniently and easily attack principals, saying they're not dealing with the problem. But I have to remind those critics that some teachers are afraid themselves of intervening. And the government is going to force them to obligatorily report, obligatorily intervene. I had to point out to the government—they changed it, mercifully—that teachers could put themselves at risk if they were forced by law to intervene. On matters where two people are fighting it out, and a teacher is supposed to go in there by law and intervene, you put yourself at risk as a teacher. That's not what the law should be doing. There have got to be different and better ways to deal with it. But to be fair to the government, they dropped it, and that was a positive thing.

Now, some principals had the solution, and have the solution, of continuing to expel students as the answer, and I suspect that many of them could do that. But given that the government now has moved in the direction of saying that the school has to deal with it, principals are wary of kicking people out without trying to deal with the problem. So my point is the following: Zero tolerance

doesn't work and did not work; mandatory reporting is better than nothing; an awareness week on bullying is good, and better than not doing anything. But in my view, we have to do a little more, and by the way, it's not for lack of ideas.

Some of you will remember Mr. Falconer, a very good lawyer who did a very good study of some of the problems that some of our schools face in terms of violence, homophobia in our schools and violence against those who are homosexuals in our system. They talked about young women being sexually abused, sexually intimidated, on a regular basis—a high number of young women talking about sexual abuse against them. Mr. Falconer talked about what we should do. He handed a thick report to the board of education. The Toronto board of education is strapped for money; they are entirely broke. Just the other day they said they needed \$20 million to deal with special education; otherwise, they can't serve kids who have special needs. They are broke. So the culture of inaction, for me, leads to the minister and the ministry, in terms that once you have a report of that nature with incredible insights about what to do, and the government sits by and does nothing, that is where the culture of inaction will hurt our system and our young people.

Mr. Falconer talked about establishing "school-based teams made up of social workers, child/youth workers and teachers to help family caregivers navigate and access the mental health services their children and youth require, and these teams should make use of the variety of treatment techniques, and work across disciplines." Mental illness is a serious problem in our system. Sexual abuse happens, and that scars young people, and they in turn sexually abuse others. We need to deal with that.

Mr. Falconer proposed that we set up school-based teams, and we haven't done it since his report was released three years ago. He talks about the board hiring 20 new full-time social workers, that the board should hire 20 additional child and youth counsellors, that the panel recommends that the board should hire 24 additional attendance counsellors—the list goes on.

We also have a report by Mr. Curling and the Honourable Roy McMurtry. They did an extensive study of the problems our young people face, especially our racialized communities. They gave out a long list of things we could do, and we have not acted upon it. That's my frustration as an MPP.

So while we express platitudes about, "Yes, bullying happens. It's not nice for students, and we're trying to do some things. We've got Bill 157 and its mandatory reporting." While we express such platitudes, the seriousness of the problem continues and young people suffer. I'm going to support this motion, absolutely; it's a good motion. But we need to deal with the reports that talk about how prevention happens and what supports teachers and principals need to be able to do a good job. Until we do that, we will not solve the problems of violence, sexual abuse and bullying in our system. Until the government actually addresses that, they're a part of the failure of our system and they're a part of an

extension of the bullying that goes on in our school system, and until they acknowledge and recognize that, we will not solve this problem.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I want to begin by sharing an old piece of wisdom from way back, which I think the member from Kitchener-Waterloo has always understood, and that piece of wisdom is this: We never pay our debt to the past until we've left a future indebted to ourselves. She has always understood that, the importance of passing on values at every different level, and most particularly in our school system, so I want to first and foremost put that on the record.

This is pretty basic. I don't know if it was Maslow who said that tolerance begins at the point of difference, not at the point of sameness; I think it was. He talked to us about a hierarchy of needs, and the very first and most fundamental need was what he called trust versus mistrust. When a young child is trying to take their first steps, they need assurance that mom and dad or whomever is going to be there to catch them. They don't just need it when they're infants, when they're taking their first steps. Students have a right to know that when they go to school, they're safe. Parents have a need to have the assurance that when their children are out in society, those who have some kind of authority or some kind of responsibility, including members of this Legislative Assembly, are there standing with them. I want to say that, because I think that's the fundamental value that we need to pass on from one generation to another if we're going to pay our debt to the past.

I'm an educator by training. I picked up an old educational psychology textbook this morning just to go through some stuff on bullying and violence. There was an interesting quote that I found that I wanted to share: "Researchers have consistently reported a negative correlation between virtually every aspect of school achievement and bullying." If you get bullied and you're afraid and you're anxious, you don't do as well as if you're encouraged to be confident and to express the giftedness that you've been given at birth and that has been nurtured by those responsible others that you come into contact with.

I want to say that and I want to just go, for what it's worth, to the very heart of it, and that's the trust versus mistrust part. That includes being able to trust Legislative Assemblies to try to do the right thing. I know that there was some reference to zero tolerance. I think we need to have infinite tolerance when it comes to kids who, for whatever combination of reasons, may feel that the most appropriate thing they can do in their lives is bully somebody else. That's a problem that needs to be dealt with. That's why I'm pleased that the previous minister, with her culture of action, actually moved forward with the Safe Schools Act. I want to say respectfully that there's much more than mandatory retirement in the Safe Schools Act. I see the member from Kitchener-Waterloo—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: There's nothing in there.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Let me tell you what has happened. Since that act has been passed, our government has invested \$178 million, new dollars—I know some may say that's nothing—in new programs; major investments in additional professional resources, enhanced community partnerships. We've been—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You forgot about those, Rosario.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Yes, you left that part out—specific training of 7,500 principals and 25,000 teachers; the newly established kids phone line, which I know the member from Kitchener–Waterloo knows and appreciates, where young people can talk to other young people about their concerns is a very liberating thing for them. In addition to that we have the safe schools action teams that are there and our government has continued to press.

I didn't want to make this political. By the way, I thought the member from Kitchener–Waterloo should be particularly complimented for not making this a political issue.

We continue to press the federal government to ensure that handguns are taken off the street as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this chance to speak in support of the motion brought forward this afternoon by my friend, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

This motion, this legislative achievement today, follows a long list of accomplishments for the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. She supported the new cardiac centre at St. Mary's hospital. She supported the new cancer centre, dialysis unit and MRI at the Grand River Hospital. She supported childbirth and children's services at Grand River. She helped to expand emergency department care at local hospitals. She supported the University of Waterloo's school of pharmacy. She helped to rebuild long-term-care homes, including Parkwood Mennonite, Sunnyside and Trinity Village.

She introduced Telehealth Ontario. She introduced free flu shots for Ontarians, which have saved many lives. She introduced the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program for new mothers, and I was glad to support her work on this. She supported KidsAbility, the children's treatment centre in our area; and the list goes on and on.

The foregoing shows that the member for Kitchener–Waterloo is here for a reason. Good people in her riding worked hard alongside her so that she would take her seat in this House. She has been elected and re-elected to the Ontario Legislature five consecutive times. Through her work, she demonstrates her idealism, tempered by the realism of her experience. Her community has extended its trust time and time again and has given her this privileged position to effect positive change for everyone in Ontario. This she has done, and all residents of Ontario have been the beneficiaries. I believe that there is no MPP in this House who does a better job than Elizabeth

Witmer; she's simply the best. Ontario has had many fine political leaders in her history and I think Elizabeth Witmer ranks as one of the finest. I feel very fortunate to have had the chance to work with her.

She once said in a summary of her political philosophy, "We need to embrace a conservatism that is caring—not narrow, but broad; not harsh, but kind; not divisive, but inclusive. Help me show Ontarians that common sense and compassion go hand-in-hand."

That common-sense, compassionate approach is the basis of her resolution today, for each and every child in Ontario deserves a safe school in which to learn. Making sure we create those conditions is a responsibility not just for educators, although they obviously have a very significant role. It is, I believe, our collective responsibility, whether as parents, students, or even elected representatives as we are here, to ensure that our children are safe and free from bullying, and intimidation.

Bullying in any form, whether in person or online, is totally unacceptable. That's the message I hope we can help to send by supporting this resolution this afternoon. It's a serious issue with far-reaching consequences for children and youth, their parents, their families, their peers and their communities. Anxiety, loneliness, withdrawal, physical illness and low self-esteem are just a few of the problems afflicting those who've been bullied. They can develop phobias, they can take on aggressive behaviour themselves, they can slide into depression, they miss school and, of course, bullies themselves begin to lose their sense of right and wrong. How serious is this problem? It's very serious.

I want to read a few facts provided by the member for Kitchener–Waterloo in preparation for these remarks this afternoon. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, roughly 315,000 students in grades 7 through 12 reported being bullied in 2007. In the same year, roughly 90,000 students in grades 7 through 12 reported being bullied on a daily basis. One third of students experienced bullying at school while almost a third has bullied someone else. In 2008, the CAMH study found that bullying and harassment can lead to depression, substance abuse, anxiety and academic failure.

Research from the Ministry of Education tells us that bullying prevention can work. In fact, clearly articulated, school-wide bullying prevention policies are one of the foundations of effective bullying prevention programming. To that end, we have a great start with this resolution. By supporting this resolution, we are calling on the government to officially recognize the third week of November as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week in Ontario. Secondly, we are calling on the government to have every safe school team in the province direct development of activities for their schools during Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week.

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Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, supports this resolution, saying, "Activities related to an annual focus on bullying awareness would naturally fit the role of the new safe

school teams.” Good advice from the teachers. Let’s work together. Pass this resolution—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Mrs. Witmer, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to thank my colleagues, the members for Newmarket–Aurora, Ottawa Centre, Trinity–Spadina, Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale and Wellington–Halton Hills. I do appreciate the support that has been provided for this motion. I talked earlier today to both the Minister of Education and the Premier, who have also indicated their support. I do thank you for it.

I want to again thank Katie, Sunnie and Lesa for being here today. If it wasn’t for those people, I wouldn’t be here with this resolution. I was inspired by their stories and I have many more stories contained in files in my office from parents and students who suffered at the hands of bullies.

Today we have an opportunity to make a difference—all of us. We have an opportunity to support the resolution. We have the opportunity to ensure that this year in November, the third week, we can officially recognize Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week.

We can make sure that all of the safe school teams in the province of Ontario are ready to go with activities that are going to ensure that all of the students throughout this province, if they’re bullied, know that they can go and get the support and help they need.

We will have an opportunity to help bullies learn different ways of dealing with their anger and their aggression. We’ll have the opportunity to make sure that teachers have the opportunity for in-servicing.

Together we can make a difference, but it’s going to mean that each one of us needs to make a concerted effort. We can’t just say that bullying is bad, bullying is happening, bullying is serious. Each one of us in our own communities can participate in ensuring that within our schools there is a safe, caring and inclusive culture.

Again, I want to summarize with Mike Neuts’s message: Bullying is wrong. People get hurt. People die. It must stop, and it’s up to everyone in the community to stop it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will vote on Mrs. Witmer’s ballot item in about 50 minutes.

SUSTAINABLE WATER
AND WASTE WATER
SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT
AND MAINTENANCE ACT, 2010
LOI DE 2010 SUR LA VIABILITÉ
ET L’AMÉLIORATION DES RÉSEAUX
D’APPROVISIONNEMENT EN EAU
ET D’EAUX USÉES

Mr. Caplan moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 237, An Act to sustain and encourage improvement in Ontario’s water and waste water services

and to establish the Ontario Water Board / *Projet de loi 237, Loi visant à assurer la viabilité des services d’approvisionnement en eau et des services relatifs aux eaux usées de l’Ontario et à favoriser leur amélioration et créant la Commission des eaux de l’Ontario.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member, Mr. Caplan, has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. David Caplan: At the outset of my remarks, I’d like to introduce Mr. Chris McNally, director at large of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association.

I had established at first reading that sustaining and improving our water and waste water systems while retaining public ownership of our water utilities is fundamental to protecting our drinking water. I’m concerned about the condition of our water and waste water systems.

One of the challenges is that many Ontarians today have an inadequate knowledge about the condition of their water systems. Indeed, decades of underinvestment and planning have threatened the future of water services. Essential investments have been neglected and we are now at a detrimental stage. In many cases, the water pipes have surpassed their maximum life expectancy.

In some municipalities, including certain areas of Ottawa, for example, parts of water systems date back to the 19th century, as early as the 1870s. Here in the city of Toronto half of the water network is at least 50 years old and almost 10% is more than 100 years old. This aging system is vulnerable to increasing breaks. It’s estimated that the city of Toronto now has more than, on average, 1,500 water main breaks per year. That’s over four per day.

Well-maintained and well-functioning water and waste water systems underpin our very quality of life. For far too long, we’ve failed to give water its full value. Changes need to be made in the way Ontario’s water and waste water systems are organized, governed and regulated. If gone unnoticed, I believe this will pose a major threat to our public health and safety, environment, and will cause economic hardship.

With regard to human health, toxic lead pipes, corroded water pipes and broken sewer pipes are a potential source of drinking water contamination. With regard to the environment, broken water and waste water pipes can contaminate rivers and lakes, making such sources detrimental for drinking and recreation and threatening wildlife and fish stocks. Regarding the economy, broken water mains often cause disruptions in traffic, significant property damage and substantial costs to our cities and to our society at large.

For all of those aforementioned reasons, this act is important to all Ontarians. Clean, safe drinking water ensures that Ontario is strong, healthy and prosperous.

This bill, Bill 237, evolves from Justice O’Connor’s recommendations from the Walkerton inquiry, which provide the regulatory aspects and steps needed to prevent similar events from occurring elsewhere; and

from the water strategy expert panel's report—and I thank Dr. Swain for his work—which makes recommendations on all aspects of organization, governance, investment, financing and pricing related to Ontario's water and waste water systems.

This year, in May, marks the 10th anniversary of the Walkerton water tragedy, when 5,000 residents of the town of Walkerton, Ontario—when their water system became contaminated with *E. coli* bacteria. By the end of the tragedy, at least seven people had died from drinking water with *E. coli* contamination and over 2,500 people became sick.

By enacting this bill, we will be taking the necessary measures to ensure that safe, reliable and sustainable water and waste water systems are available to future generations in Ontario.

I'd like to outline what's in the act. The purposes of the act are several-fold:

- to ensure that public ownership of water and waste water systems is maintained. If implemented, this bill would completely rule out private ownership. It's imperative, in my opinion, that we keep water and waste water systems in public hands;

- to promote financial stability. This bill would promote full cost accounting and full cost recovery of water and waste water services. And I want to give credit where credit is due: A previous government did introduce, in Bill 155, these very same measures. It would encourage an increase in scale and capacity in the provision of water and waste water services to minimize costs to the ratepayers, both business and residents;

- to improve transparency in the provision of water and waste water services to the public. This would be done through the establishment of publicly owned municipal corporations;

- to create an independent economic regulator, the Ontario water board. The Ontario water board will have the expertise and authority to administer the act. The responsibilities of the board: It would exercise its powers and duties in the public interest and in accordance with the principles of honesty, integrity and social responsibility. So it would be responsible for, amongst other things, protecting the interests of consumers with respect to pricing and reliability and the quality of water systems; promoting economic efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the provision of water and waste water services; facilitating the maintenance of a financially viable water and waste water industry in our province; promoting water conservation in a manner that is consistent with the policies of the government.

There are other benefits, and I'd just like to highlight one in particular, and that is energy savings. Besides the significant public health benefits of the legislation, the act will result in major energy savings for communities.

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Water is the number one energy user in municipalities around Ontario. It's a fact that across Ontario, most of the energy is often wasted due to the leakage and other inefficiencies contained within our system. Many drink-

ing water distribution systems have leakage rates ranging from 10% to 50%. The average: 25% of every drop of water that is purified and sent through the system is lost through leakage in the system. That is incredibly inefficient, and the people who pay for it are the water users and ratepayers themselves. This legislation would help reduce the burden of wasting energy as a result of more reliable and more environmentally sustainable water and waste water systems.

Lastly, many citizens have an inadequate knowledge of the condition of our water and waste water systems and are thus operating with an inadequate plan for long-term sustainability. If implemented, this act will reveal the “out of sight, out of mind” aspects of our water and waste water system by bringing often-hidden vital services into broad daylight. In turn, this will provide our citizens with the peace of mind that safe, reliable and affordable water and waste water systems are in place. In fact, I believe it will encourage economic development and activity by providing that peace of mind to our business communities as well.

But others have written to me and have commented about this legislation, the Sustainable Water and Waste Water Systems Improvement and Maintenance Act, or SWIM, as it has become known. I quote:

“The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario believes that Bill 237 contains a number of important elements that lay the groundwork for creating truly worthwhile and transformative legislation that will provide the necessary guidance to municipalities to provide for ‘full-cost recovery’ for both the capital and operating elements of public water and waste water provision.... The adoption of this bill will be integral to the successful implementation of regional economic prosperity efforts, and to the goals envisioned in the ‘Places to Grow’ legislation where growth is directed to priority areas.... This model for water and sewer services has been on the Queen's Park ‘to do list’ for many years.... Will our collective patience finally be rewarded?” That's Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

I quote: “By passing this bill, the provincial government will ensure effective delivery and maintenance of water and waste water services that will ensure the success of Ontario's growth plan.... We look forward to working with Mr. Caplan and the provincial government to help inform and educate the public of the need for legislation to ensure the sustainability of our greatest provincial resource.” That was Greg White, president, and Joe Accardi, executive director, Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association.

“The creation of an Ontario water board will serve as an independent economic regulator that will provide and promote financial sustainability and transparency, and safeguard the quality of Ontario's water for future generations.... We are proud to support your legislation, and look forward to working with you on this significant and progressive piece of legislation.” That was Leith

Moore, chair of the Building Industry and Land Development Association here in Ontario.

"Your bill will compel municipalities to create realistic infrastructure investment and maintenance plans, while ensuring that citizens are not overcharged for services. Protecting our sewer and surface water systems is crucial for protecting public health and private property. The Insurance Bureau of Canada ... fully supports your efforts, and will watch the progress of this bill with great interest"—from Ralph Palumbo, vice-president, Ontario, the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

I have as well: "There are two things in life which we cannot do without—one is air to breathe, and the second is water to drink; these are essentials to life. Your bill picks up where the Walkerton report stopped. It builds a responsible structure in which we can be the stewards we need to be for this precious yet "finite resource. A system whereby the responsible decisions, infrastructure and monetary support for clean water is essential for the survival of our civilized society. We are blessed" and must "have access to the Great Lakes, and as such we must show leadership and water stewardship. Thank you for taking that leadership." That was Jennifer Mossop, former MPP and co-chair of Aquafest eco-festival on Lake Huron.

In conclusion, water and waste water infrastructure in Ontario have been on a steady decline for decades. It is clearly time, in my opinion, to take action. With the recommended changes in Bill 237, most water services in Ontario can become sustainable with neither undue financial burden on ratepayers nor threats to our public health. The sooner we act, the sooner we start to save costs and the sooner we can start to maintain a strong water sector in Ontario that will be sustainable for decades to come. I strongly believe that Bill 237 is the right legislation at the right time for a problem that will not go away without attention.

Water is an essential part of life for all Ontarians, and we have taken it for granted for far too long. Clean, safe drinking water ensures that Ontario is strong, healthy and prosperous. It's time to make a change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As I review Bill 237, the Sustainable Water and Waste Water Systems Improvement and Maintenance Act, I get a sense of déjà vu. We have been here before, and history is indeed repeating itself this afternoon with the introduction of this bill and many of the concepts inherent in this bill.

We all know it's a private member's bill—it's not a government bill—but we've got concepts like water waste reporting and commitments to full cost recovery, which is very important. It builds on work from legislation that was actually passed by this House in 2002, when the previous government worked through Bill 175, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act.

We know that imitation is one of the more sincere forms of flattery, but the truth is that like any sequel aiming to echo the strength of its predecessor, this

legislation really doesn't reach the bar of the original. It's true that, here as well, there are some striking similarities between this private member's bill and the government bill that's sitting there now. As the member opposite pointed out, nothing was done with it for the last seven years, but there are some similarities.

But the question is, what happened over the past seven years? Where are the regulations? We haven't been in government in seven years. What happened to Bill 175? It was designed to achieve the kinds of goals we're talking about this afternoon. What happened to that legislation? It received royal assent in 2002. Why do we have to go through all of this all over again, close to eight years later? We had the report, the plans, the entrenched notion of full cost recovery for waste water and water services. It passed third and final reading and received royal assent on December 13, 2002. What has happened in the past seven years? Obviously not too much.

It has been pointed out by Joe Accardi, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association—I know his name was mentioned just a few minutes ago—that the guts of Bill 175 were never enshrined in regulation, certainly not in the last seven years, leaving it in limbo. Today, Mr. Accardi continues to advocate for "legislation and regulation to be in place at the provincial level to ensure dedicated reserve funding through a full cost recovery model." They've been waiting on this government for seven years to do something. What do we get? A private member's bill. It's a frustrating thing.

I'll read this in a second, but these concepts are already in place and ready to be enshrined in regulation, and there they've sat for close to eight years. The precedent from our previous government was set with Bill 175. I'll just go back to that original eight-year-old legislation. I quote from the law:

"Regulated entities"—municipalities, for example—"are required to prepare and approve a report concerning the provision of water services and waste water services.

"The act specifies that the full cost of providing services includes source protection costs, operating costs, financing costs, renewal and replacement costs and improvement costs. The full cost may also include other costs specified in the regulations," which have never come forward from this government.

1540

"Each regulated entity is also required to prepare a cost recovery plan describing how it intends to pay the full cost of providing the services

"Once a cost recovery plan is approved, the regulated entity is required to implement it no later than the date specified by regulation.

"The regulations may also specify the maximum amount of any increase in the amounts payable by customers."

This was enshrined in the legislation. Some of these points will be raised by the member from Simcoe North. We'll give you four minutes at the end to kind of wrap that up, if that's okay.

"The minister is authorized to make orders requiring regulated entities to do, or refrain from doing, such things as the minister specifies in order to ensure"—again, here's the important phrase—"that the entity pays the full cost of providing the services."

That was eight years ago. This brings us full circle to where we are today—not quite full circle, because, as I noted earlier, the member from Don Valley East made what I consider a noble attempt at imitation, but there are some differences that trigger a number of questions. Before I get to them, I'll read from the new explanatory note from this proposed bill, Bill 237. There are some alterations.

"The bill establishes the Ontario Water Board as an" agency "of the crown." Sounds like another crown agency. I don't know whether we're going to need this. The Ministry of the Environment is the lead on this stuff. I ask the member opposite to think back to Walkerton. I don't know whether you want to hand over that kind of responsibility to an unelected, unaccountable board.

At any rate, there are some questions out there. Do we need a whole other level? Do we need another crown corporation to deal with an important issue like this?

"Regulated entities that provide water services or waste water services to fewer than 10,000 customers are required to amalgamate those services with the services of one or more other regulated entities...." It goes on and on. That idea has gone over like a lead balloon in rural Ontario.

"Regulated entities must prepare business plans"—there's nothing wrong with that—"for the provision of ... services.... The plan must contain, among other things, an assessment of the full cost of providing water services or waste water services...." Again, we agree with that. That is all to the good.

Just to fast-forward here, I've given you a bit of an overview, comparing both pieces of legislation, and the concerns we have about calling for municipalities to amalgamate services, particularly among far-flung communities and in the north, where you're dealing with remote communities that would have to link up with other organizations miles away.

One example: information from North Grenville; 2,000 users on service. It may take three or four other municipal partners to amalgamate services under this plan. I don't know whether that's realistic or whether that would be doable. Some of these people in the rural municipalities are a little nervous about that one.

I received a copy of a letter addressed to the Premier of Ontario. This was dated February 10. It came from AMO, and I quote: "AMO does not support this bill or the process that a private member's bill brings;" calling it "one of the most significant changes to municipal water and waste water systems and governance."

Also, AMO President Hume goes on to address another concern, and he states: "This bill would significantly restructure municipal water and waste water services, a core municipal responsibility, without consul-

tation...." It's too bad there wasn't some consultation on this legislation.

I would like to pass my time over, down the road, to the member from Simcoe North.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a privilege to be able to address this private member's bill today.

I have no doubt, and I would say that most people in this Legislature would agree, that we have problems with water infrastructure in Ontario. If a doctor diagnoses pneumonia, I think we can agree that there's pneumonia. I just don't like a prescription for leeches. That's essentially what has been presented to us today.

Bill 237 is based on the key recommendations of the report of the water strategy expert panel which was submitted to Mr. Caplan when he was minister of the former Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. In fact, as minister, he had a fair amount of power in his hands to act in a previous capacity. Key recommendations of this report are reflected in Bill 237, including the proposed amalgamation of smaller water and sewer systems that serve fewer than 10,000 customers, full cost recovery for this infrastructure and the establishment of a regulator at the proposed Ontario Water Board for water rates and services.

When I got this bill, I checked around and asked others their opinion. The Council of Canadians, which has done a large amount of work on water in this country—in fact, it's seen as a leading advocate for the protection of Canadian water and Canadian water systems—summarizes the bill as follows: "The act will result in the forced corporatization of municipal water and waste water services, the loss of public control and steep increases in tariffs for Ontarians, and absolve the provincial and federal governments of their responsibilities to address Ontario's water and waste water infrastructure deficit."

I would say that is not a particularly promising kind of bill; I think they have summarized it well. There are quite a few people who don't like this bill. Clearly the Council of Canadians doesn't. I don't like this bill. Simply based on their assessment in that one paragraph, I would say that I don't think this Legislature, and you as legislators, should be voting in favour of this bill.

The Canadian Environmental Law Association does not like this bill. They have a very solid reputation for action on water issues, and they have tremendous credibility in their assessment of these issues. You should know that they acted as counsel, representing concerned citizens of Walkerton—a group of 500 local residents—in the inquiry following the water contamination incident. CELA prepared reports in relation to the provision of safe drinking water, which were submitted to the Walkerton inquiry during phase two.

The organization has considerable experience and expertise in relation to the issues that were addressed in the expert panel's report. In fact, they wrote a document: Comments of the Canadian Environmental Law

Association Regarding "Watertight: The case for change in Ontario's water and wastewater sector." In their review of the panel report, they found that a number of the panel's key recommendations were fundamentally at odds with Justice O'Connor's recommendations. CELA expressed great concern "that the governance model and the institutional arrangements recommended by the expert panel would significantly erode public accountability and transparency over the operations of water systems in the province." Based simply on that statement, I have to say that one should not be voting in favour of this private member's bill.

They went on: "Furthermore, it would unnecessarily divert a substantial amount of the provincial government's resources and staff time to establishing new institutional structures and operations which will be largely redundant, costly and unwarranted. It is CELA's view that the provincial government's efforts should instead be directed to abiding by its commitment to implement all the recommendations from the part two report of the Walkerton inquiry."

They note that the panel that wrote the Watertight report cited a company called EPCOR, which is owned by the city of Edmonton, as a model example of a corporatized utility, exactly what is being promoted in this bill. The well-respected Parkland Institute raised serious concerns about EPCOR's accountability. The Parkland Institute comments:

"On EPCOR's board there is a lack of participation and oversight by city council and other stakeholders. The utilities EPCOR controls are no longer the subject of democratic decision-making and there is no requirement for public transparency. The city cannot set the operational priorities like environmental protection or wisely managed, cost-efficient development. Finally, direct accountability to the public has been curtailed. The corporatized utilities model is no longer subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Key documents governing EPCOR's accountability with the city are unavailable to the public."

You have the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Environmental Law Association—nationally recognized organizations and advocates for clean, safe drinking water—saying that the basis for this bill is not the basis for protection of the water supply of Ontarians. I think on that basis alone, we in this chamber should be setting this bill aside, voting against it today, and moving on to actually dealing with the substantial problems we do have with water in this province.

1550

Now, the speaker from the opposition noted the opposition of AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. I just want to read comments from their statement on January 5, 2010. They say, "The bill could result in the most significant restructuring of the governing, costing and operations of water and waste water services across Ontario. Restructuring of a core municipal government service to the degree that this private member's bill proposes runs counter to the principle of building a

fully informed piece of legislation through a consultation process.... If the government's intent is to pursue such a significant reform to municipal water services, then it should come forward with a white paper and undertake a full consultation with the municipal order of government."

On the website cottagecountrynow.ca, in the area of Muskoka and Parry Sound, there's commentary from East Ferris mayor Bill Vrebosch, who sits on the board of AMO. "I don't understand what Caplan is doing," he said, stating most bills are brought forward to the AMO before being presented in the House, but as a private member's bill [it] doesn't have to go through this process. 'It's kind of a backdoor approach.'" He noted the requirement for a minimum of 10,000 users in a system. He said that in the north this can be massive, saying "the water corporation's expanse would be massive potentially running from Burk's Falls to Temagami."

In North Grenville, there were comments in the Kemptville EMC by reporter Ashley Kulp that CAO Andy Brown had reported to the Committee of the Whole on January 18 that if the bill should pass, it would "drastically change the way North Grenville residents receive and pay for waste and waste water services." In addition to a variety of changes he cites, it says that "the complete cost of the water will include source protection costs. However, Brown outlined that the province is fully funding these costs currently and 'it is clear that this bill could end that practice and pass it on to the water users.... In the end, the proposed bill will remove decision-making for water and waste water from municipal councils,' Brown explained."

Now, I want to say to MPPs in the chamber who represent rural and small-town areas, those from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Oxford, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, those who deal with the problems that we face in Ontario in rural and small-town areas, that you have a responsibility to look out for the interests of your constituents, and if you fail to do so, you should be considering a career change when the next election comes, because this will not be a popular bill. This bill will not protect your residents. This bill will be a download. This bill will be stage two of the amalgamation process that many communities went through so painfully. So if you want to follow Mr. Caplan in his efforts to help you move on out of political life, then so be it, but if you want to protect your constituents, defeat this bill today.

I want to say to the Premier's office that if, in fact, you want to say to your candidate in Leeds-Grenville that that candidate shouldn't be respecting the interests and needs of those constituents, then turn your back on the people and have your ministers support this bill. If you want more amalgamation, more privatization and more downloading, then the vehicle to do that has arrived in this chamber, and today we have the opportunity to discuss it.

I find it very strange that the member is bringing this bill forward. As has been said, he was the Minister of

Public Infrastructure Renewal for a number of years; he was in place when the recommendations came forward. He could have acted then. Frankly, if he wanted to move forward on a Conservative piece of legislation, he could have, within cabinet, moved forward the regulations that would have allowed implementation of the earlier model of this bill.

I know that there's a significant problem with water and sewage services in this province. There is a figure being used of \$700 million a year that's being lost in water that is leaking out of the system. Even if that's an estimate that's double the value, \$350 million a year is a huge volume of cash that is being lost to the people of this province.

If we want to deal with that, what we need is a partnering between the provincial government and the municipalities to provide the funding to make sure that that infrastructure is corrected with the repayment coming from the savings. That is a lot of money to be, quite literally, running it into the earth—a lot of money. That approach, I think, can work.

We have seen a downloading to municipalities that has strangled infrastructure investment. That downloading has not been corrected, and thus we continue to see an underinvestment in our infrastructure. We will pay for that.

But to bring forward something that is not a solution and use the problem as a cover for passing these kinds of measures is a mistake. I call for everyone in this House to vote today against this bill and stand up for the environment and for public ownership of water systems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Glen R. Murray: I'm not sure what province the previous speaker lives in, but it can't be Ontario.

I read the Council of Canadians' paper as well. It was a fascinating piece. What are they opposed to? They're opposed to metering and cost recovery. The alternate of that is called perverse subsidy; it's what most environmentalists, like most of us on this side of the House, believe is wrong. You don't raise people's other taxes to use water and sewer to subsidize sprawl, because in addition to the problems that we have had in Canada with broken water and sewer systems, it's a massive subsidy because people don't pay their own way, because we've put sewer and water in places it doesn't make sense to do. Taxpayers can't sustain it.

This government, quite frankly, has done more than any other I can find in the country in the last seven years: Places to Grow, the greenbelt. Tax reform is repricing and replanning urban development to powerfully reinforce the containment and more efficient use of our water system. Far from being johnny-come-latelies, this is the next logical step in this process. Quite frankly, if previous governments had committed to the land use, transportation and sustainability strategies and the fiscal policy to support them, these kinds of policies would have had traction.

The other thing I find disappointing from my friends in the NDP is fear-mongering, because I'm happy to take

this bill to the honourable member's constituents in Toronto Centre, Toronto–Danforth and Trinity–Spadina and all my neighbours in downtown Toronto and talk about the values that are in this. This is about sustainability. This is a reward for people who are making environmentally positive choices, and it ends perverse subsidy. This is exactly what the member, in my mind, from Toronto–Danforth should be standing up and voting for in this House because this is advancing the values of his constituents.

What are those values that this bill is actually trying to achieve? This is a bill that moves us from living off the interest, understanding the scarcity of water in our watersheds—we are, in Toronto, in one of the most important watersheds in this country. All that you have to do is look at the ravines that bisect most of our constituencies to understand the powerful nature of water and its importance.

We need to have collaborative planning—hardly a threat to rural communities. I came from, as some of you have pointed out today, a part of the country that has low levels of population. We may want to look to our friends in Manitoba and the NDP government there that introduced watershed planned regional collaboration. Far from being something that didn't get them elected, it got a lot of New Democrats elected because there was a collaborative model around funding and planning, because this also brings to the table data, financing strategies and the kind of knowledge resources we need not only to protect our water supply and ensure we're living off the interest and not diminishing the principal of our water supplies; it allows to us do something that we Liberals believe in, and it separates us from the Tories and New Democrats.

The Tories who hacked and slashed and gutted infrastructure and downloaded created a crisis that led to water conservation problems and an enduring infrastructure crisis. The alternative is actually to build the tax burden, to continue to support policies of perverse subsidy or simply raise everyone's taxes, which seems to be the NDP's solution to most problems, and have everyone pay through the nose to deal with it.

1600

What planning does—and it's a system that started in Europe, called value planning—is it allows you to understand the return on investment, because we all understand that well-planned, efficient, environmentally sustainable water in cities builds the tax base. When you coordinate transportation and land use planning, you get and cluster development. You organize your resources so you are using less pipe and less infrastructure to serve people than you otherwise would. You not only save money on the cost side; you increase property values, you increase asset values and you create a growing tax base. Every time you put in efficient, well-planned streets, transit and water, you build the value of property, reducing the overall tax burden, because you raise your revenues from a growing tax base rather than a growing tax burden, consistent with the HST and our tax reform.

It's amazing to me the selectivity of some of my friends in opposition about who they listen to. I've heard New Democrats almost worship at the foot of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and all of a sudden this is an organization that has no value to them when they come out and endorse the HST. I hear them worship—I have acute respect for Jim Stanford and the CAW. As soon as the CAW comes out and says the HST will actually create hundreds of thousands of jobs and will continue to help sustain our auto sector, all of a sudden those folks are nothing but Liberal supporters' daily food bank.

I have a lot of respect for the Council of Canadians. So let's look at what they talk about. Forced amalgamation: There's no forced amalgamation. This is a choice-based system. Quite frankly, when you've spent as much time as I have in northwestern Ontario—I was mayor of a city, as was mentioned earlier, called Winnipeg. We took garbage from northwestern Ontario and brought it to Manitoba and put it in our landfill, because it was leaching into the watershed and the water supply of many municipalities in northwestern Ontario and destroying the quality of life, which undermined their tourism and their economic base.

Far from being a horrible thing that rural members and remote members should be afraid of, the local leadership of an MPP in working with mayors, community leaders, non-profit environmental groups and residents' groups to look at how we can get efficiencies of scale, protect our environment and secure our water resources for the future is exactly the kind of thing that you would expect the NDP to support, not be against. I'm quite happy to go out and knock on doors in any community, with any rural or remote member and not only defend this; I'd love to have the debate with the local New Democrats or Conservatives who would like to make the case against this. Because it's ironic to me that where the great water crises have been, for those of us who have proudly been Ontarians for a good chunk of our lives but are no less proud Canadians because we've lived in other places, are places like the Battlefords.

All of these horror stories that are being whipped up have actually been happening often at the hands of democratically elected municipal councils. That's not to diminish the role or importance of municipal councils. Simply to say that the construct of a local governance model is inherently the causal effect of a system of water failure is completely spurious, not really worthy of debate, in my mind.

I want to just conclude by saying that one group of people I like is Pollution Probe. They talk a lot in their last report on water management about something called "jurisdiction best-placed." They talk about the need for provinces and municipalities to create collaborative partnerships, to align resources, to get into better planning and to use data better. This comes pretty darned close. As far as AMO, this is the beginning of a consultation process. Even as a newbie here, I know a little bit about the legislative process. I know my friend

Mr. Caplan, the member for Don Valley East, is one of the most consultative people I've ever worked with, coming from the non-profit sector. We need not fear that, and I'm sure my friends at AMO don't.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the time to speak today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to join in the debate this afternoon on Bill 237. I want to go back to what my colleague Mr. Barrett was saying when he mentioned Bill 175. When the member originally stood up today, he mentioned the Walkerton inquiry. That's now 10 years—10 years in June. We promised the citizens of the province of Ontario that we would move quickly on those recommendations. That's why the previous government, the Progressive Conservative government, brought Bill 175 forward; and since that time, since the bill was proclaimed, we've had actually no action. There have been no regulations brought forward. This House has passed it. In fact, the government, right today, could bring regulations forward on Bill 175.

However, I understand that the bill will be controversial. I've got letters here from the Council of Canadians. There's a form letter being sent out to a number of people who are objecting to the bill. They're asking us to vote against it, and I can sympathize with them. But this is the first step. It's a step where we debate second reading here in the Legislature, and if this House passes the bill or it passes second reading today, we have the opportunity to go to committee. That's how this process works.

You know what? The Council of Canadians can come and bring their points forward. The environmental law association can bring their points forward. Some of our constituents—even AMO can bring their concerns forward. We can make amendments to the bill.

I recall being part of the Bill 175 hearings. Some of the folks came from the Ontario Sewer and Water Main Construction Association. You know what? I remember they brought in a cross-section of a 16-inch cast iron pipe that they'd had cut out. Right in front of our eyes they showed us a pipe that had been cut out, and it was down to four inches in the centre. That's how much iron had built up inside the pipe.

We need do something. Sitting back and complaining and saying that this legislation is no good or that Bill 175 is no good is not good enough. We have to make sure those pipes are repaired in an orderly fashion and in a fashion that will be good for the environment, as well as for the citizens and their drinking water in Ontario.

I don't have a problem, as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, seeing this bill go to committee and listening to AMO, listening to our constituents and the Council of Canadians. I've had a great deal of work with the Council of Canadians just this year with the site 41 issue up in Tay township. They were strong

advocates and helped us a tremendous amount—Maude Barlow and her group.

When we look at this, we have to keep an open mind. The bill does cover full-cost recovery, which is something Bill 75 did as well. However, you know what? This doesn't prohibit municipalities in Ontario from getting grants like the stimulus package or from some of our infrastructure programs or the Canada-Ontario infrastructure programs. Those are all programs that will still be available for municipalities.

I understand there is an impact on rural Ontario municipalities, the very small water systems, but you know what? I'm sure we can work around that with proper regulations and proper input. But I think to sit here and just to flatly turn down this kind of bill is no better than having no regulations for Bill 175. We brought that bill forward. We're disappointed that Bill 175 was never acted upon.

I think we should keep an open mind here. If the government will vote in favour of this and we can get it into some kind of committee hearings, I don't have a problem with that. I'd look forward to having those hearings, hearing the debate take place and moving forward with a clear vision for our water and waste water systems here in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: First of all, I want to congratulate the member for Don Valley East for having tabled this bill. It is a very, very important bill. I am a strong believer in water conservation.

I'm just going to speak about two issues that are contained in this bill: first of all, water metering and the second one is the regional system.

First of all, water metering: Way back when I first got elected on council and I became mayor in 1976, there was a public utilities commission in place. At that time, they were an elected body, and they came out with the issue of having metering for all households in the town of Rockland.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, I was against it completely. We used to take one million gallons—not litres—a day of water, and after we got those meters in, we cut it down to 250,000 gallons a day. Three quarters of the water consumption was cut. This is why I'm a strong believer in water metering.

First of all—besides that—when the government is allowing municipalities to go ahead with projects for which we are giving them grants, no grants should be given to any municipality that does not have water meters in operation. I have a municipality that did purchase water meters, but they're not in operation. They have water meters at the filtration plant, but they're not operating in every home. So, really, there's no gain there because from the tap it goes to the waste water, and again it becomes very expensive.

1610

Secondly, the regional water system—way back in the late 1980s, there was J.L. Richards engineering in

Ottawa, a well-known engineering firm that came out with a proposal down in my area of having a regional water system. It would have cost us \$31 million to serve nine different municipalities. We didn't get the support of the government at the time, and one municipality said, "No. Do you know how much this is costing up to now, and we're not finished yet?" We're up to over \$80 million just to install the water system in those municipalities.

I have a good example here at the present time. They will all be meeting the minister next week. North Glengarry needs the water. They were going to connect to St. Isidore, and it would have cost \$27 million just to service 380 households. I said, "It's impossible, \$27 million. Even if you get one third—one third from the feds and the province, it's not enough." Now they're going to go to Cornwall and the St. Lawrence Seaway and they will service six municipalities at the cost of \$52 million. I fully support that one because it is going to be a regional one, but all the others—I'm looking at the municipality of Russell right now—\$23 million. They could have been part of that \$31 million, but the government at the time didn't push any municipality to go for regional. This is why it's very important.

The minister mentioned all the leaks or the breakage here in Toronto. We have a system in place in Ontario now where you could repair all the water mains without digging any trench. It is available. The first project was done in Hamilton, I believe, and it happened to come right from my riding. Caesar's Plumbing is in place right now to fix all those leaks without having to do any trenches and digging in the street that would disrupt the traffic or any business.

I really strongly believe, like the member from the other side said, that we should pass the second reading, and if there are amendments, let's do it at their hearing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Caplan, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. David Caplan: First of all, I'd like to thank all of my colleagues who took the time to comment on Bill 237. The members from Haldimand-Norfolk, Toronto-Danforth, Toronto Centre, Simcoe North and Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, I thank you very much.

I agreed with many of the comments; I disagreed with others. I must say that the member from Toronto Centre particularly impressed me. I think he showed why the people of Toronto Centre have wisely sent somebody who has a tremendous, broad sense of public policy and understanding of these kinds of matters, and will bring that wealth of experience to matters that bear here in this Legislature. I thought he made tremendous sense and brought a great deal.

My colleague from Toronto-Danforth, unfortunately, did not add much of substance to this debate. I say to the member from Toronto-Danforth, I would be happy to debate you here or in any place around the province of Ontario when it comes to water conservation, when it comes to infrastructure investment, when it comes to

regional planning. Sir, I know that I could beat you hands down any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

I say to my friend from Simcoe North, I know that he has fought battles around water, and I give him a lot of credit because it is a tremendous resource and it is of tremendous importance to the people whom we represent. I do know that he has tremendous understanding and is wise in these matters.

The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell I think spoke from very practical experience about the nature of water metering, conservation and the level of investment that's required.

My colleagues here in the House, this is incredibly important not only for today but for the Ontario that we want tomorrow, the Ontario that will be strong and prosperous, that will have health and safety available, because water is one of our most precious resources. It is something that we have treated with disregard. It must end and it must end now. I do urge you to pass Bill 237 so that we can get on with the job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has now expired.

BRITISH HOME CHILD DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE JOUR

DES PETITS IMMIGRÉS BRITANNIQUES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item number 58, standing in the name of Mr. Brownell.

Mr. Brownell has moved second reading of Bill 241, An Act to proclaim British Home Child Day. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Brownell?

Mr. Jim Brownell: I ask that Bill 241 be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy? So ordered.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with ballot item number 59.

Mrs. Witmer has moved private members' notice of motion number 127.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

SUSTAINABLE WATER AND WASTE WATER SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT AND MAINTENANCE ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA VIABILITÉ ET L'AMÉLIORATION DES RÉSEAUX D'APPROVISIONNEMENT EN EAU ET D'EAUX USÉES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Our final ballot item is number 60, standing in the name of Mr. Caplan.

Mr. Caplan has moved second reading of Bill 237, An Act to sustain and encourage improvement in Ontario's water and waste water services and to establish the Ontario Water Board. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some nays.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The bill is carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Caplan?

Mr. David Caplan: I move that it be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government? Agreed. So ordered.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I move adjournment of the House.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Ms. Jeffrey has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 am.

The House adjourned at 1617.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Peters, Hon. / L’hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l’Assemblée législative
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		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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Pupatello, Hon. / L’hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
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Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L’hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 22 February 2010

Lundi 22 février 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 22 February 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 22 février 2010

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the nondenominational prayer.

Prayers.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I bring this point of order under standing order 1(b)(iii) and standing order 1(c), which gives the Speaker power or jurisdiction. If you bear with me, I'm going to be very brief—as brief as possible.

I do want to, at the commencement of this point of order, refer to Griffith and Ryle on Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedures, page 777:

“Parliament is not directly involved in the process of governing the country or providing its system of public administration. It has the secondary task of sustaining in office the government of the day, whilst simultaneously performing its essential role of holding the executive to account. This crucial parliamentary task can too easily be taken for granted. Governments are by nature secretive and must be forced into the open. Governments prefer to conceal actions which in the event do not reflect credit on their administration. The more that is known of what governments intend, the greater is the scope for criticism. Under many systems of government, secrecy and concealment are commonplace. Dictatorial regimes do not admit of elected assemblies that do more than record their assent. Challenges even to the most unlawful of official acts will, at best, go unanswered.”

Marleau and Montpetit—and this is echoed, of course, in the second addition by Bosc et al—page 416:

“More than any other segment of the parliamentary day, question period serves as a daily snapshot of national political life and is closely followed by members, the press and the public, each sitting day of the House. It is that part of the parliamentary day where the government is held accountable for its administrative policies and the conduct of its ministers, both individually and collectively.”

Furthermore, the ruling of Speaker Jerome, back in 1975, referred to in Marleau, again, on page 419: “He”—Jerome—“established that asking oral questions was a right, not a privilege of the members, and he identified several principles for the conduct of question period.”

I appreciate that we don't have a standing order 15 like the federal Parliament has. We, however, do have the Executive Council Act, as amended, still in effect, which of course—section 7—requires attendance of cabinet

ministers at question period; that is section 7(1) of the Executive Council Act.

I put this to the Speaker, and I ask you to make particular reference to 1(c), from which you will derive authority to respond and to act. We are told, and we appreciate being told, that today, over 25% of cabinet ministers will be absent. Among these are some of the most senior cabinet positions. We've only been sitting for three days; we've had a hiatus of a significant period of time. I don't have to tell anybody that there are things going on out there in our communities across this province that have to be raised in this Legislature, and most appropriately at question period.

I put to you, Speaker, that we in the opposition need your assistance. We need you to exercise your inherent authority under 1(c) of the standing orders to assist us in exercising our right to ask questions, because if the cabinet ministers don't show up, we don't have that right. That right is being frustrated. That right is being not just frustrated, but denied. I ask you to provide some direction and guidance to this government for its ministers' attendance at question period so that our right to pose questions is given effect.

Thank you kindly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: I appreciate the third party House leader for raising this point of order this morning. I don't have the references to your new book in here as well, but I do support what he is speaking about, which is that it is our fundamental right to question the government and to hold them accountable, and that question period is the most appropriate time in which to do so. When you have a situation like you have today, where a quarter or more of the government ministers are missing, it in fact implies that our rights are not considered as important to this government.

Having said that, I've always been disappointed in the fact that I've never lived on the government side of the House and have only lived on the opposition side of the House, and I wish that there was a standing order that would imply that they have to actually do something when they do attend question period in the House; that is, to actually answer questions. We understand that they don't have to do that, but we should expect, and we have the right to expect, that they would at least be here to answer our questions.

It's even more appropriate this week. I think it should be pointed out that this is one of the most important

weeks for rural Ontario municipalities in their calendar year, and that is when the OGRA/ROMA conference is on. The government, because they have a disdain for rural people, is making sure that we're in the House doing our job while they can send all kinds of people down to the ROMA conference, and thus not allow us to join with our municipal partners, because we're doing our job in the House while they ensure that our municipal partners aren't joined by their provincial members. I think that's something that should be addressed as well, something this House should be considering, and that is not sitting when the OGRA/ROMA conference is on, to show some respect for the rural municipalities of Ontario as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's my issue on this point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader on the same point of order.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this point of order this morning. I would point out that, in fact, we do have seven ministers away today, but the Minister of Education is the Acting Premier and she is ready and willing to answer all questions.

The legislation that was referred to by the member for Welland is, in fact, legislation that we brought in and that this government has passed, and it requires that ministers be penalized if they miss a third of question periods in a session. I would note for Mr. Speaker and the information of those members on the other side of the House that no one in this government has ever fallen below that threshold, and we are happy to be here to serve, to respond to all questions.

I'm unclear as to what the member was seeking in restitution on this point of order. Was he seeking to adjourn the House this morning? I doubt that. We're here, ready, willing and able to answer questions, and we look forward to doing so.

1040

With respect to the member opposite's comments on the Rural Ontario Municipal Association meetings, we are most happy to be attending some of those meetings and will continue to do so as part of our duties as government, and we look forward to welcoming them here, should they be coming to visit us as well.

While it was lovely to hear the member from Welland pontificate again this morning—because we did miss his eloquence over a period of time—we are prepared to answer questions and would like to go forward with question period this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the honourable member from Welland for his point of order, as well as the comments from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the comments from the government House leader.

I would turn the members' attention to a ruling of Speaker Stockwell on April 21, 1997, during debates. I'm going to paraphrase from Speaker Stockwell's ruling, that it's not within the Speaker's purview to ensure that certain members are present for question period, that the

standing orders do not compel a minister to be present for question period, and that the Speaker has no control over the issue even if the minister has been absent for a couple of days or consecutive days.

So, again, I thank the honourable member, but there's nothing within the power vested in the Speaker that I can compel a minister to be present during question period. I would encourage and urge the government House leader that question period is the time of day when the opposition does, as was pointed out, have the opportunity to question the government and keep the government accountable, and I would encourage the government House leader to do everything within her power to encourage as many ministers to be in attendance at question period as possible.

I thank the honourable members for their interjections.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Joe Dickson: Please join me in welcoming grade 5 students, teachers and parents from Brother Andre Catholic School in Ajax, who are joining us in the gallery today.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like at this time to introduce some constituents: in my neighbouring constituency, Don McGugan, mayor of Brooke-Alvinston, and his wife, Anne, attending the Good Roads convention today; and also, from my constituency, John Phair, councillor of the town of Petrolia.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to introduce, from CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, Susan Eng, vice-president of advocacy, and Kim Hokan, government relations and a former intern; and from Pro Bono Law Ontario, Wendy Miller, child advocacy project director.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today guests from my community. Lori Strauss is here with her son Kevin and daughter Tracey, fitting in their Olympic garb.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'd like to introduce today the parents of one of our pages, Anthony Meola from Mississauga South. His mom and dad are in the west gallery behind me. It's Luc and Diana. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: In the absence of the Premier, the finance minister or the economic development minister, my question is to the Acting Premier, I guess.

Acting Premier, it's a good thing for Dalton McGuinty that there are no Olympics for economic performance. If medals were handed out for lowest unemployment rate, Saskatchewan would win the gold, Manitoba the silver

and Alberta the bronze. Ontario doesn't even come in the top half in Confederation.

Before Dalton McGuinty took office, Ontario was the dominant gold medal winner in Canada when it came to economic performance. To the Acting Premier: How did you take Ontario out of medal contention so quickly?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: That's a very important question, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to provide some information to all members of this Legislature. The good news is, to the members of the opposition, jobs are up in the province of Ontario by 30,000. Since June, there has been a \$64,000 increase in jobs that have been created. Members in the opposition are calling over here, "Where?" and "They're public sector jobs." Actually, General Motors has 700 people coming back to work. A second shift is being added at their Oshawa facility, and I'm sure their member from Oshawa is very happy about that. Toyota is also introducing a second shift in Woodstock, and that is going to add 800 more jobs to that local economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The reality is that Dalton McGuinty, in the last year alone, promised a million net new jobs, but actually lost 140,000 jobs in 2009 alone. We all know that for the first time in three decades, under Dalton McGuinty, Ontario's unemployment rate is higher than Quebec's.

The Acting Premier must be relieved that there's no medal round for economic growth, because Alberta wins gold; BC, silver; and Saskatchewan, the bronze. Here again, Ontario is at the back of the pack.

I'll ask the Acting Premier how this happened. Was it your high taxes, was it your runaway spending, was it your increased red tape, or was it a combination of all three that took Ontario to the back of the pack?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm surprised that I have to stand in this Legislature and say to the Leader of the Opposition that there has been a global recession, that the reality that we've experienced here in Ontario has been experienced in the United States—indeed, around the world. That is why this government has been working very hard to create jobs in the province of Ontario—just last month, 30,000 new jobs in Ontario.

I want to share with the members of the opposition a report that was released today from the Conference Board of Canada. It indicates that the Ontario economy went through a severe downturn last year, but the outlook is much more positive. The economy will reverse course, with real GDP forecast to rise by 3.5% this year and 3.7% in the year 2011.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: As far as we know in the PC caucus, Saskatchewan is part of the globe, Manitoba is part of the globe and BC is part of the globe. Every province was impacted by a global recession, but Ontario, under Dalton McGuinty, fell the farthest. Under Dalton McGuinty, Ontario fell the farthest, and now we're leading the country in unemployment and job losses under

your high taxes and runaway spending. Until Dalton McGuinty came along, Ontario's rate of economic growth was booming across this province, and now we're limping along like some aging athlete. This is an extraordinary failure of leadership in the Premier's office and the finance minister's office.

When will Dalton McGuinty finally realize that it's time for him to hang up his skates?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We have great faith in the people of this province to get through this recession, which has been experienced in every jurisdiction around the world. With respect to the impact that has been felt by families in Ontario, it has been significant. There is no other jurisdiction in Canada that manufactures and exports more goods around the world than the province of Ontario. We will continue to work with companies and with manufacturers in Ontario. We will continue to create a climate that will invite businesses to come here, invest, and create jobs—the very initiatives that you speak against every day in this House and that you vote against every chance you get.

PROVINCIAL DEBT

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Deputy Premier: No doubt, after six years in office, Dalton McGuinty's failed policies have taken Ontario from the engine of growth that used to power Canada to a have-not province with its hand out to the federal government, on the welfare rolls of Confederation. It gets worse: According to your own budget figures, you will have doubled the provincial debt by 2012.

Over the couple of weeks when Dalton McGuinty mused about Dalton days, he said that he liked alliteration. I ask the Acting Premier: How do you like the sound of "Dalton the Debt-doubler"?

1050

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Our government has made the investments that have been necessary and that have in fact created jobs in the province of Ontario. We partnered with the federal government on the most significant infrastructure program that has ever been undertaken in this province and in our country—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will please come to order. I'm finding it difficult to hear the answer.

Please continue.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm very surprised at the members of the opposition when we're talking about investments that have taken place in your communities. The municipalities have been absolutely delighted; all the groups that have received resources from this government would say it is past time that those investments were made. We are committed, in partnership with the federal government, to make those investments at a time when our economy needs those investments to keep jobs, and at the end of those investments, we will have excellent infrastructure that has—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't know what planet the Acting Premier is coming from, because that is not the story we are hearing from hard-working Ontario families across this province, increasingly struggling to make ends meet, and now they have to deal with Dalton's enormous debt increases.

Let's put this in perspective. It took from Confederation to when Dalton McGuinty came into office to get total debt to \$148 billion. By the finance minister's own projections, Dalton McGuinty, in his time in office, will spend his way to a \$290-billion debt by 2012. In less than a decade, Dalton McGuinty has managed to create a debt level equal to all of the other Premiers in Confederation combined.

I ask the Acting Premier: Why have you mortgaged away the future of our children and grandchildren?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We are working in partnership with the federal government. We continue to make the investments that we know will create jobs for Ontario families. We have also implemented a program of tax cuts for families. They voted—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You missed it because you were heckling.

Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Again, our government has made a concerted effort to assist families to get through these difficult economic times, and that is why we implemented a program of tax cuts, which you voted against; 93% of Ontarians will receive a tax cut. We have also restructured the tax system in Ontario. It's restructured in a way that, when they were in government and even in opposition, but before it was introduced in this Legislature, they were in favour of a harmonized tax structure. They voted against that. We know that those—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Acting Premier says they're reducing taxes. This is the government that brought in the so-called health tax—a massive tax increase. This is the government that's bringing in the HST sales tax grab. Hydro rates are going up. Auto insurance rates are going up. You say you are going to reduce taxes. Acting Premier, with all due respect, give me a break. There's only one way under Dalton McGuinty; that is, taxes are going up. We know that after six years in office, you will have added \$150 billion to the provincial debt; \$150 billion on the backs of our children and grandchildren because you had your runaway spending.

Please tell me, Minister, because we all know that today's deficits under Dalton McGuinty are tomorrow's taxes exactly what tax you plan to increase next.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I want to take the opportunity to share what other leaders have to say about actions, the state of the economy and how governments need to respond to the challenges we have experienced. I have a quote here: "I actually do think we are in a rare

period, one that as an economist I don't think we would see again in my lifetime, where deficits are not only necessary but actually advised."

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Who said that?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: That was Stephen Harper. So we have the Prime Minister of Canada, who understands and appreciates that we are in very unusual, unique economic times, and it does require a very unique response. We have partnered with the federal government. We are making investments. At the end of the day—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. On Friday, the McGuinty government announced \$14 million to plug a hole in the Niagara Health System's budget, but hospitals across the province are in deficit and are being forced by this Liberal government to make cuts to patient care. For example, hospitals in London, this minister's hometown, have placed 63 jobs in limbo, including jobs of front-line nurses. What is the minister doing to stop these cuts to patient care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question from the leader of the third party, especially as it contrasts with the questions we heard earlier. It seems there are some people in this House who think that you can balance budgets without doing the really hard work that's happening right now in hospitals right across this province. This really is tough work that the hospitals are engaged in. No decisions have been made on what the increase in funding for hospitals will be, other than: There will be an increase. The Premier has said that clearly.

We have built a very strong foundation in our health care system. In the six years that we've been in office, we have made deliberate investments in health care. Because we took those steps in the previous six years, we will be able to weather this economic storm from a much stronger position than we would have otherwise. In the last six years, we've increased hospital funding—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It appears to me that the minister seems to be basing decisions on political impulses rather than on a sound health care strategy in this province. Worried about a by-election, the minister found \$15 million for a Toronto hospital. Attempting to divert attention from the closing of emergency rooms in Fort Erie and Port Colborne, the minister found another \$14 million for hospitals in the Niagara Health System.

Will this minister continue to play cynical politics with Ontario hospital funding, or will she reveal an actual plan so that hospitals will be funded properly in this province today and into the future?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite knows that part of the ongoing work of the Ministry of

Health and Long-Term Care is working with hospitals through the LHINs to determine where additional investments need to be made. This is part of the work we do every single day.

The suggestion that we ought not to have kept the Grace hospital open is one that simply astounds me. It was the party opposite that actually created extraordinary distress amongst the patients at Toronto Grace, the staff members, the families. They created an issue where one did not exist.

We will continue to do the work that we do, which is to look very carefully at every dime we spend in health care and make sure the right investments are made to maintain the very high level of health care that we have in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: By this minister's response, it's even more obvious that there is no plan for the growing crisis Ontario hospitals are facing. The minister seems to be making it up as she goes along. If this was an Olympic event, they'd call it freestyle hospital funding.

When will this minister come forward with an actual plan, instead of denying that there is a crisis while she goes about picking and choosing hospital winners and losers?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The work that we do in the ministry is tough work. We rely on experts to help us make the decisions that we must make in order to maintain and improve the high level of health care that we have. We have increased funding year over year over year for hospitals over the past six years. A 42% increase over six years is an extraordinary investment in health care.

We are at the point now where that kind of year-over-year growth is simply unsustainable. Regardless of the economic situation we now find ourselves in, it is time to look very carefully at the spending on health care. It is time to make the right investments, the smart investments, the investments that are based on evidence. We are determined to continue to improve health care in this province.

1100

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Acting Premier. Earlier this month, the Harper government announced that they had negotiated a new trade deal with the United States government. As details emerge, more and more people are asking very serious questions about that deal because it seems to give up a lot and get very little in return.

So my question is a simple one: Will the McGuinty government commit today to holding public hearings across the province so people can actually see and debate this deal in the open?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Trade issues are very important, and we have our Premier and our Minister of

Economic Development and Trade who are absolutely focused on ensuring that we have the best deal in place for the people of Ontario and ensuring that we can continue to bring high-quality jobs to this province. Our government has made that commitment very clear and we will continue to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families are being told that this deal is supposed to protect jobs, but as details leak out, they're wondering exactly whose jobs those are. For example, fair wage policies in communities like Sudbury may very well now be at risk as a result of this deal. If that's the case, why won't the government let people see for themselves at open, public hearings what impact this policy will have on their jobs and on their communities?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We are very interested in working with the honourable member. I know that she was offered a briefing on the agreement that we have forged, and I don't know that the honourable member has responded to that. So, again, I make that offer so that she would take full advantage of the briefing. We would be very happy to bring her up to speed on what that contains.

What I can say is that we are eager to ensure that more jobs come to Ontario with this agreement, and we're confident that with the deal that has been put in place, that in fact will be the case. It is the case that when you open yourself up for business, that means we have tremendous opportunities, greater opportunities than before, to seize jobs for Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would suggest that this government decide once and for all to actually brief the public and hear what the public has to say on their policies around this trade deal, because people are very, very worried about their jobs. They don't want to see rubber-stamped backroom deals by politicians who continue to say, "Just trust us. We know what's in your best interests." They expect their government to actually be accountable.

This deal has been criticized as lopsided and unfair. Even the federal Liberals call it questionable and underwhelming.

With thousands of jobs at stake, why is this government afraid of open, public debate and dialogue on this secret, backdoor trade deal?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We have been hearing from the public about the work that has been achieved with this deal. I have a quote from Jayson Myers. Jayson is the president and CEO of CME. He said, "This is an important agreement.... puts Canada in a stronger position to fight counterproductive protectionist policies in the future." That was just last week.

We also have a municipal partner from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Basil Stewart says, "Canadians are fighting hard to recover from the recession, but they need to be on a level playing field with their

neighbours south of the border.” He would say that the agreement that has been reached “gives them hope.”

So the public has responded to the agreement that we have forged. They are positive about it. We believe that it will bring more jobs to the province of Ontario. That is what the people expect of us.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Tim Hudak: To the Acting Premier: February is the four-year anniversary of the McGuinty Liberal government abandoning the rule of law and leaving the residents of Caledonia to fend off home invaders on their own.

The Hamilton Spectator is reporting today that the McGuinty government plans to hand over the Douglas Creek Estates to the Six Nations. The Ontario PC caucus opposes this move. We believe it is the wrong thing to do.

Acting Premier, can you please tell us why you are planning to hand over Douglas Creek Estates to the Six Nations at this point in time?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As Attorney General and Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, I can tell you that no decisions have been made with respect to the Douglas Creek Estates property.

What we have done and what we continue to do is encourage people who live as neighbours to engage in productive discussions. The future of any relationship begins with those productive discussions, and we will continue to encourage that. No decisions have been made with respect to the land. We continue to work very hard as a province, trying to bring everybody to the table, and we look forward to an ever more energetic federal government to help resolve a 200-year-old land claim.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary? The member from Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: To the AG: In court testimony, a woman described her terror on a night when she was alone with her child in her home and bandits broke into her home. She called the police; no one came. Criminals ransacked the house, electronics were smashed, upholstery shredded, mattresses were urinated on and china was smashed. “White trash,” “pigs” and “racists” was written on the walls, and those are just the words I can repeat in this chamber.

An Ontario family’s home is invaded and Dalton McGuinty does nothing for them. Why are you treating the lives of Ontario families like they are just another issue to be managed?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Nobody—I won’t speak to the specifics—should be treated in any way, shape or form other than in a way we would all expect to be treated. Those in charge of effecting security in the area have a very challenging job and are working very hard at it. But I would come back to the point I made to the Leader of the Opposition: At the end of the day, it’s building relationships. The MPP for Brant, Dave Levac, has worked

very hard to help build those relationships. I would encourage the members opposite, rather than taking the opportunity today to ask the types of questions they do, to engage in a productive way to help build those relationships and to bring a more energetic federal government to the table because a 200-year-old land claim can only be solved by the federal government. We need action now.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Two years ago, I brought to this minister the case of a 74-year-old grandmother who was cut off from temporary care assistance. The minister told me that the ministry’s cuts were justified and that I was wrong and we were wrong for challenging her actions. After an exhausting two years, the Social Benefits Tribunal has issued its decision. It is this minister who is wrong, wrong and wrong.

Will the minister finally take responsibility for her actions and reinstate temporary care assistance to all—I repeat, all—grandparents who have been wrongfully cut off?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, I take exception to what the member just said. Temporary care assistance is a benefit that is owed to those who qualify, including the grandparents. This member opposite wants us to believe that it’s only grandparents who are entitled to it. No, there are other people also. There are specific rules around this benefit and those are applied by the municipality—the director of Ontario Works in each municipality. When people are not receiving these benefits there is an appeal process, and I encourage people to go to the appeal process after they have spoken with those administrators in each of the municipalities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Once again, the minister is putting words in my mouth. The minister still doesn’t get it. Her ministry directives are wrong. There are choices here. The minister can let each grandparent go through a two-year tribunal process, costing their families extreme emotional and financial stress and unnecessary waste of tax dollars, or she could make a promise to these families, to CARP, to Pro Bono Law Ontario and to all Ontarians.

Will this minister introduce regulatory changes that reflect a large and liberal interpretation to ensure that temporary care assistance is equally delivered across Ontario in accordance with the original intent and the law of this province?

1110

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, I don’t think that the member is right, because if I look at my stats, in 2003-04, there were 300,000 cases of temporary care assistance in our caseload, and in 2008-09, it’s over 4,000 cases. I think that the program has been applied very fairly. Again, if grandparents and those who believe they qualify are not receiving benefits or their benefits have been stopped, I encourage them to appeal after they have spoken to the administrator of the program in each of the municipalities.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. As Ontario's economy recovers, news of job losses is increasingly displaced by news of job gains and job creation measures assisted or implemented by the province of Ontario. But the jobs that concern so many young Ontarians are those that assist the students preparing for a career in the 21st century. As winter runs out of its icy breath, students turn their thoughts to how to find summer employment while they pursue their education and training for a life in the trades, the professions or in other work. Summer jobs are a growing part of their talk and their activity.

Minister, what initiatives and programs has Ontario implemented to help more youth find summer work in their communities?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank my colleague from Mississauga–Streetsville for asking this question and for his interest in the summer experience program. Actually, this is a very important program for our students. The provincial government provides \$10 million in base funding, and we also add \$3 million from the federal stimulus program to this. It provides opportunities to about 5,000-plus students to gain some experience and gain valuable transferable skills which will be very valuable to them in the future as well. We are providing almost 5,000-plus students the opportunity to work with the government and gain good experience under this program. These are tough economic times, and it is our duty to make sure that our students gain valuable experience and at the same time have the opportunity to earn some money as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Some 70% of the jobs in this decade require post-secondary training, and all of the assistance Ontario can offer youth as they prepare to contribute to their families, to their communities, to their province and to their country is even more valuable. Young people need to know that these programs are available, what they offer and where the summer opportunities can be found. The experience program that you have described, Minister, is what many students have asked me about in their classrooms.

Would the minister share some specific industries and opportunities currently available to Ontario's young people looking to gain valuable experience in the Ontario public service?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Summer jobs are available in business, critical government activities and a variety of programs like recreation, culture, fish and wildlife, travel and tourism, laboratory research, justice administration and law enforcement.

These programs start in May and last six to eight weeks. They will be advertised starting March, and there are staggered dates for the students to start. As I said before, these opportunities provide students with work experience and transferable skills.

There are additional programs that we also offer through the government. There's the Ontario internship

program, aboriginal youth work exchange program and the OPS learn and work program.

Most of the details about these programs actually can be found on the Ontario government website. I just want to quote that website so that students have the opportunity to go to that website—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Acting Premier today. Why didn't you protect the tax dollars that you handed over to Samsung from being funnelled into full-page, partisan ads in the Toronto Star?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: What I can say is that the investment that has been made by the people of Ontario with Samsung will create 16,000 jobs in the province of Ontario. I think that's very important to families who will benefit from that investment, who will gain employment with that company.

This is a direct result of the Green Energy Act that we've passed in the province of Ontario. It has been recognized around the world that this is the jurisdiction to invest in with respect to green technology. Samsung has partnered with us to move that forward. We're very delighted with that, and we're particularly delighted because 16,000 Ontarians will gain employment from this investment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Their promise to create jobs holds up as well as their vow to end political partisan advertising with our dime.

Last week, Dalton McGuinty was caught red-handed taking money from Ontario families and giving it to his own Liberal family for partisan HST ads. Now the Liberals are at it again with a full-page ad that Samsung placed in the Toronto Star, after they cut the foreign company a multi-billion-dollar sweetheart deal.

When the Liberals were in opposition, they said they would make it illegal to use public money to create a partisan impression of the government. In fact, Dalton McGuinty said, "Partisan government advertising is a disease, and I have the cure." So I have a question for you, Acting Premier: Why would you say you would stop partisan ads when you had no intention of doing so?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Well, we did. I know that the honourable member was not in this Legislature when her party was in government. She would have then seen first-hand what partisan government advertising is all about. I know my colleague from St. Catharines who sits next to me even has some examples in his desk of calendars that were put out with members' pictures. There were ads in newspapers. There was a lot of taxpayer money spent by the former government for partisan ads.

When we came to government, we said that was unacceptable. Taxpayers did not appreciate seeing their dollars spent that way, and we stopped that practice. It is

something that we continue to be committed to adhering to. We go to the Integrity Commissioner to ensure—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Acting Premier. You'll know that municipal leaders from across Ontario are meeting now at the Ontario Good Roads Association. We know that those municipalities are stretched to the limit when it comes to the amount of funding they have to run their own municipalities. Are you prepared today or some time over the next couple of days to give some good news to those municipal leaders and to say that the Ontario municipal partnership fund will not be reduced next year?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I do look forward to an opportunity to meet with municipalities from my riding and from ridings right across Ontario at the ROMA/Ontario Good Roads Association conference, and they do come with very important issues.

What I have heard from municipal leaders since we've been on this side of the House is that they very much appreciate the investments we have made and the partnerships we have forged. We are known as the government that has uploaded. There was another government that was known as the government that downloaded; we are the government that has uploaded. Municipalities very much appreciate that we have uploaded Ontario drug benefit and ODSP costs. They very much appreciate that we are now paying fully 50% of ambulance costs in municipalities. We have now committed and are paying 75% of the cost of health units for municipalities. We have a very strong partnership with municipalities—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

1120

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, it's quite interesting because municipalities, quite frankly, are spitting mad that the OMPF is going to be reduced next year. For the community of Opasatika alone, they're saying that if you go ahead with the reduction that you're planning, they're going to give you the keys to the municipality. In the case of the town of Hearst, they're saying that with the hit that they take, they can't sustain.

They're not happy with you, Minister; they're upset, and they're looking for this government to do what's right. So I ask again: Is this government prepared to review its decision not to reduce the OMPF next year?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Since we've been in government, we have developed a very positive relationship with our municipal partners. In fact, many of my colleagues are there right now, as we speak, because we respect and value—we have rural municipalities in the city today, for the beginning of this week, and because we value so much what they have to say to us, we are there, listening to their issues.

It is because of that relationship that we have uploaded the hundreds of millions of dollars of costs off the shoulders of municipalities. We have done that because we have gone to ROMA and OGRA, we have listened to what they've said to us, and we've acted.

What I can say is that we will continue that partnership with our rural municipalities, and we will continue to work to ensure that they have the resources they need to provide the services that are so very important to the people in their communities.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, several constituents have approached me regarding what the government has done for the developmental services sector. I understand that we are currently going through difficult economic times. However, we cannot forget about those Ontarians who need our help.

Would the minister tell us what this government has done to date and how it will continue to support the ongoing needs of the developmental services sector?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'd like to thank the member from London—Fanshawe for his great work when he was my parliamentary assistant and worked on that file.

Our government has made significant progress in making Ontario's communities inclusive for people with developmental disabilities. We have invested over \$500 million in developmental services since we took office. We know we still have to do more, but we are proud of our accomplishments to date.

This government passed new developmental services legislation that will allow us to make some major improvements to the developmental services system. Furthermore, Ontario's last three institutions for adults with developmental disabilities were closed, moving nearly 1,000 facility residents to their homes in order to live and participate in their communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Recently, I have heard concerns regarding the proposed LGIC regulation as a part of the Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act, 2008, and whether or not direct funding could be used to access residential supports. Would the minister please address this issue so I can inform my constituents about the government's action in this area?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This is a great question. Our legislation will help people with a developmental disability live more independently, have choice, and help Ontario build a more modern, fair and sustainable developmental services system. The legislation includes direct funding as an option for meeting individuals' support needs, including activities of daily living, community services, caregiver respite and person-directed service and support.

While an individual who receives direct funding cannot use it to purchase a space in a ministry-funded residential setting like a group home, their direct funding could be used to create individualized living and supported arrangements with the families, friends and the community in which they live.

We have made tremendous progress in making Ontario's communities inclusive for people with developmental disabilities—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

DARLINGTON NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, the Society of Energy Professionals said last week that Ontario must get on with the job of building new units at the Darlington generating station. Your current plan is to run the existing reactors at Pickering only until 2020. Rod Sheppard, president of the society, said, "If Pickering only operates to 2020, then something must be done very, very quickly to get" on with new construction. Mr. Sheppard said that the province has wasted time dithering on the decision.

Minister, do you agree with Mr. Sheppard? And what is your plan?

Hon. Brad Duguid: No, of course I don't. The member knows full well that it is our intention to move forward with the new build. He knows that we've been through a very thorough procurement process. He knows that we're trying to get the best deal for Ontarians, and I think he and all Ontarians would expect nothing less from us than to ensure we get the best possible deal.

This is an important decision; we are going to make sure we get it right. Our intention is certainly to move forward with the new build. We're in discussions right now with AECL and the federal government, and if the minister has an ear with the federal government perhaps he can utilize those contacts as well.

We want to make sure that we do get the best deal for Ontario. We want to make sure that AECL—as the federal government, in the middle of this procurement process, put them up for restructuring, we want to make sure that their future is solidified as well as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, after 2011, we won't be dithering as you are today. This is the number one issue perhaps in Ontario, not just in Durham region.

The new capacity at Darlington will create over 5,000 jobs and even add a reliability factor to the electricity grid that's missing today. Minister, your government did not hesitate to sign a \$7-billion deal with Samsung, and you're not giving Ontario's domestic energy producers the same consideration as your Korean partners.

Minister, when will you come clean with the people of Ontario that nuclear is on and you're going to get on with the new build at Darlington?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Talk about trying to have it both ways—16,000 new green jobs in this province through the Samsung initiative is not good for Ontario, but the investments in nuclear are something totally different.

We are investing in nuclear. We'd think the member would be up commending us for the decision to move forward to the next stage in the refurbishment, which is going to create thousands of jobs in his area of Durham. When we look at the refurbishment of Darlington and the extension of life for Pickering, that's good news for his community. But no, he doesn't get up and talk about that; he tries to talk about something completely different.

You may not care about those 16,000 new green jobs and green energy; you may not understand the need to invest in the new economy; but we do, and that's good news for Ontarians; that's good news for those who are looking for work; that's good news for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. On Saturday, I was in Brockville, and everyone I met said that they feel this government takes them for granted. One of them was a gentleman named Ron Stewart. He said that the Liberals' unfair HST will force him to lay off from his landscaping and property management business. My question is this: Why is the government moving ahead with this unfair tax scheme without listening to people like Ron?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Thank you for the question. I was just in Leeds–Grenville on Friday, I say to the leader of the third party, and I had an opportunity to meet with many business leaders, who were delighted to hear that under our tax reform, of course, they will be able now for the first time to retain the provincial sales tax, lowering their cost of business. That was very warmly received.

I had an opportunity to speak to the people in Leeds–Grenville, and I said to them, "The question is"—as we had the St. Lawrence as a backdrop—"are we going to have jobs on the other side of the river or on this side of the river?" The most important thing in that by-election is that we have a government that is committed to making sure there are more jobs on our side of the St. Lawrence River. That's why we're moving ahead with our tax reform, because it is cutting taxes for people, some \$10 billion over the next three years, and cutting taxes for business, some \$5 billion over the next three years. That is good news, and it means there will be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The people of Leeds–Grenville have seen more than their fair share of layoffs already, like 275 jobs at Shorewood Packaging and 200 jobs at Invista. Many families are struggling to get by to this day. McGuinty's new tax might help Bay Street, but

small business owners like Ron are going to get hit, and there is no doubt about it. He's going to have to cut staff as a result. Those are his words, not mine.

1130

Can the Acting Premier explain how it can be good for the region's economy for small businesses like Ron's to be hit by the HST and have to lay off workers when they're already suffering huge job losses in that region?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. John Wilkinson: There could be nothing further from the truth. I say to the member of the third party that it is important in this debate that we talk about the facts. The reality is that this is something the small business community in this province has been asking for for some five years.

When I had an opportunity to mainstreet in Brockville and I talked to companies like Kinda Electronics and I went to a florist shop and to a restaurant, every one of them was so pleased to understand that, for the first time, they will be able to retain in their business the cost of the PST, allowing them to be more competitive, to be able to hire more people, the ability to reflect that in their price so that they are more competitive. For Ontario to have jobs in the 21st century, we have to accept the fact that we have to be more competitive, not less competitive.

I say to the member opposite that when I had an opportunity to meet with those people and say to people, "Go to www.Ontario.ca/taxchange and you will find the information"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Consumer Services. We are now into the early part of a new year, and many people want to start the new year off right. Some have made resolutions. Resolutions to eat more nutritious food and lose weight are probably the most popular ones for many Ontarians.

When it comes to losing weight, a regular exercise program is a great way to stay in shape, and for a lot of people, joining a fitness club is a way to stay focused and disciplined. Some constituents in my riding have told me that they would like to join a fitness club but are concerned about the commitments involved. Can the minister advise the House what the Ontario government is doing to ensure consumers are protected when signing up at a fitness club this year?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you to the member for Oak Ridges–Markham, who is a great advocate for consumer protection in her riding. She does a great job.

I'm delighted to tell all members of this House that at the Ministry of Consumer Services, we are here to help. In fact, the ministry provides advice and assistance on over 55,000 inquiries and complaints each and every year.

Here are some tips we share with Ontario consumers when it comes to registering at a fitness club: First, re-

member that you have 10 days to cancel your contract. Second, pay your membership on a monthly basis. In Ontario, lifetime memberships are illegal. Lastly, read the fine print and ask as many questions as you can.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Again, this question is for the Minister of Consumer Services. I'm glad that the minister, through her ministry, is making consumers aware of their rights when entering into an agreement with a fitness club. That being said, there can be some bad apples out there. I've spoken to a few constituents in my riding who have had specific complaints.

Many in my very diverse riding of Oak Ridges–Markham do not have English as their first language. They are concerned about entering into long-term agreements. I would like to ask the minister: What is she doing to educate consumers on this subject?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Complaints about fitness clubs are among the top 10 complaints each and every year. I am pleased that my ministry has worked hard to ensure that consumers know their rights. Last year, the number of complaints that we received about fitness clubs dropped by 16%.

I believe that consumer education and outreach are central to our prevention efforts. Every year we do a number of things, including producing a Smart Consumer calendar in several languages. We also deliver approximately 100 public education and community events. As well, we distribute consumer-protection-focused articles in newspapers all across Ontario in several different languages.

For more information, I would recommend that anyone go onto our website, the Ministry of Consumer Services, at ontario.ca/—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, in 2006—that's right; four years ago—your predecessor, Dwight Duncan, announced with some fanfare that Ontario would be building new nuclear reactors. Since that big announcement, you've been signing contracts high, wide and handsome at premium prices for energy supply based on politics and intermittency. When might construction begin on these reactors so that Ontario has a secure supply of dependable baseload energy?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm delighted to respond to that question by saying that our government still is very much committed to moving forward on the new nuclear build. Recently, we've committed to moving forward in supporting Ontario Power Generation in a very significant refurbishment project that's very important in terms of moving forward with our modernization of our nuclear units.

We recognize the need to move forward with the new build as well. We're in discussions with AECL. The member may want us to just take any price that's out

there without worrying about what is in the best interests of Ontarians. That's not the way we do business on this side of the House. We're here to get the best possible deal for the people of Ontario. We will do whatever we need to do to get that deal. We continue to be in discussions with AECL, and I'm confident that we will move forward with this purchase.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The minister should know that if you want to move forward, you've got to get the transmission out of either park, neutral or lost.

Minister, we know that 3,000 megawatts of baseload energy will be leaving the system with the shutdown of Pickering by 2020. We also know that six more units at Bruce and the four existing units at Darlington will have to be taken out of service for refurbishment. While you've waited, waffled and wasted time, the clock has not stopped ticking. The success of our economy is directly related to the security of our energy supply. Thousands and thousands of jobs are at stake. You cannot shirk your responsibilities any longer.

I ask the minister: When will a real decision be made, and when will construction begin on new nuclear builds in this province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's really difficult to sit back and listen to the party opposite, who barely planned energy supply to get them through their term, let alone into future generations. Their record speaks for itself. We're taking tough decisions today to ensure not only that we plan beyond our term in office; we are planning well into the future. We are looking forward 20, 30 years with the decisions we've made. We're supporting Ontario Power Generation, as they move forward with their refurbishment plan in Darlington. That's talking about supplying power 20, 30 years down the road.

We're looking forward to moving forward with the new nuclear build. That is a decision that, if his government were in office, they'd be putting off until after the next election. We're making tough decisions today, but we're doing it in the interests of Ontarians. We're going to get the best possible—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. Just as a by-election was called in an Ottawa riding where thousands of ex-Nortel workers live, the McGuinty Liberals suddenly found \$200 million to put into the underfunded Nortel pension plan.

My question is this: Will the McGuinty government show the same concern for the 5,000 retirees and 2,500 active workers of AbitibiBowater who learned last summer that the AbitibiBowater pension plan is underfunded by some 25%?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The honourable member would know that we have heard from and listened very carefully to the retired pensioners from Nortel. They

reminded us of the legislation that we have in place in the province of Ontario. I would also say that Ontario is the only province in Canada that has a pension benefits guarantee fund. The announcement that was made with respect to the Nortel pensioners confirms for them and for the people of Ontario that, through that pension fund, we will support their retired workers to ensure that they are able to receive at least \$1,000 per month. That is what the fund has guaranteed. The honourable member would know that. The honourable member was actually in government when this fund was in place as well.

So I believe that the announcement of which the member speaks very clearly demonstrates that we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

1140

Mr. Howard Hampton: What the thousands of workers in Thunder Bay, Kenora, Fort Frances, Iroquois Falls and Thorold heard is that the government has \$200 million for the underfunded Nortel pension plan. Many of these workers have worked for AbitibiBowater for 30 or 40 years and have contributed to their pension plan. They were told that their pension plan is a sacred trust beyond financial or political manipulation. So their question is this: Will the McGuinty Liberals, who suddenly found \$200 million for the Nortel pension plan, show the same concern for these workers at AbitibiBowater? Or do Liberals only show concern for workers' pension plans when a by-election is called in a Liberal riding?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Our government takes very seriously the issues of pensioners, particularly those who are very concerned about the viability of their plans going forward. They are difficult times, and that is why we believe there needs to be a national response. It's certainly not just companies in Ontario that are facing these worries, and that is why our Premier has looked to engage the Prime Minister as well. We believe there needs to be a national response. Many of the companies are companies that have operations not just in Ontario but in other provinces.

Our hand is out there. We want to work with our federal partner because the concerns that the honourable member has identified are very real, they're very important, and we do want to ensure to the best extent possible that the well-being—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Bruce Crozier: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, my constituents understand that healthy eating includes eating fresh, local foods. Foods produced by Ontario farmers are among the finest, safest and best quality in the world. Buying Ontario meat, produce, eggs and dairy products supports Ontario's rural communities and their economies, and helps our farmers get a fair price for their hard work.

Our government took a major leap forward in supporting this movement when it launched a multi-year Pick Ontario Freshness strategy in 2008.

Minister, buying Ontario food also helps to protect the environment, as the food has to travel fewer kilometres, therefore reducing the use of fuel and cutting down on greenhouse gas emissions.

Would the minister please share with this House what our government is doing to promote local foods and our Pick Ontario Freshness strategy?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I want to thank the member for the question. This is such an important question for our ag community, for our rural communities.

The investment that we have made in the Pick Ontario Freshness strategy has made a difference in our communities. When you think about it collectively, why do people want to buy Ontario products? They know they're safe, they know they help our ag community, they know they're good for the environment, they know they're good for their health, and they know they're good for their pocketbook.

We have brought forward a strategy that is going to get the markets open even more. We have had great successes. The brand is recognized and the people want to see more of it. This side of the House is committed to moving forward our strategy in an even bigger way.

I know that I'll have another opportunity to speak to this and we can add even more information.

This strategy is working. It's what the people want, and it's helping our rural communities and our ag community simultaneously.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to correct the answer that I gave to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. Apparently, I put too many zeros when I answered my question. The monthly TCA caseload in 2003–04 was around 3,000 and not 300,000.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ERIC CZAPNIK

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That's John 15:13.

I am humbled and honoured to stand with my friend the member from Ottawa Centre to pay tribute to a fallen police officer, Constable Eric Czapnik. Eric was the oldest police recruit in the history of the Ottawa Police

Service, but it was as if he was destined to be a police officer and serve our tightly knit community.

Born in Warsaw, Constable Czapnik immigrated to Canada in 1990. As Police Chief Vern White said, he was everything we could have asked of a new Canadian.

In Ottawa, Eric worked at Johnson's Business Interiors, then followed the footsteps of his father, a 30-year police officer in Poland. In 2007, Eric was assigned to the East Division in Ottawa.

Now he is among Canada's fallen police officers. His loss still haunts us in Ottawa. Over 8,000 people attended his funeral. Schoolchildren lined the streets, reminiscent of the Highway of Heroes. Constable Czapnik is remembered in homes across the national capital. We still think of him and his family. We cherish his service, and we pray for his eternal peace.

The Policeman's Prayer eloquently says:

When I start my tour of duty, God,

Wherever crime may be,

As I walk the darkened streets alone,

Let me be close to thee.

On behalf of Tim Hudak and the official opposition, I offer our heartfelt condolences to the Czapnik family, particularly to Eric's wife, Anna, and his four children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will remember him.

ERIC CZAPNIK

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It is with great sadness that I rise today in the House, along with my colleague from Nepean–Carleton, to honour the ultimate sacrifice that was paid by Constable Eric Czapnik. Constable Czapnik was lost in the line of duty this past December while working the job that he truly loved for the people of Ottawa.

Constable Czapnik came to the Ottawa Police Service nearly three years ago, as the oldest recruit in the police force's history. Hired at the age of 42 without hesitation, his superiors stated that he was a community-minded individual who truly represented the Ottawa Police Service in a distinguished way.

Constable Czapnik was born in Warsaw and eventually immigrated to Canada. Becoming an Ottawa police officer was a dream that followed the footsteps of his father, whom for 30 years Constable Czapnik had looked up to as a police officer in Poland. Friends, relatives and colleagues all talked about how friendly, well-liked and jovial Constable Czapnik was, how much he loved being a police officer, how much he loved being in Canada, and how much he loved being these things in our city of Ottawa.

The last time an Ottawa police officer was killed in the line of duty was 27 years ago, yet whenever and wherever this type of tragedy strikes, we are reminded of the dangers that our men and women in uniform face—dangers they face on our behalf. Constable Czapnik is a true hero of our community and an inspiration for us all. He lived a life of service and represents a shining

example of the contribution that new Canadians make in our great society.

Our thoughts go out to his family and fellow officers of the Ottawa Police Service. He will be truly missed.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to share with the members of the Legislature today my experiences with Local Democracy Week, which was recently held here at Queen's Park.

Over 200 students attended with their teachers and participated in a day filled with activities which showcased the important role local politics play in the lives of youth.

By targeting a better understanding of politics and democracy in youth, the purpose of Local Democracy Week is (a) to help youth understand the impact of local politics on their daily lives, (b) to encourage deeper awareness and future use of the opportunities that exist to take part in political decision-making, and (c) to inspire youth to become active participants in civic decision-making by engaging them at an early age.

I was lucky enough to have a group from my own riding, from Father Leo J. Austin Catholic Secondary School, who participated in this event.

Students were able to hear from such speakers as Craig Kielburger and Michel Chikwanine from Free the Children. Their inspiring words set the stage for the political speed dating that followed. We spent an invigorating hour going from group to group of students, discussing political issues of their choice. I can tell you that it was most interesting and definitely mentally challenging.

Students were then taken on an enhanced tour of Queen's Park to see things and even sit in members' seats. I had a wonderful time sharing this experience with students. It was a memorable event at Queen's Park.

JIM ARNOLD

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise in the Legislature today to recognize an outstanding member of the Oakville community. For more than 20 years, Jim Arnold has worked as a crossing guard for the town of Oakville, and for 18 of these years, Jim has stood outside St. Matthew's School, which is at the corner of Monks Passage and Nottinghill Gate, helping children safely across the road.

Jim's dedication to his job is readily apparent. He knows every student's name and most of the parents as well. Jim is a local hero who is credited with saving the life of a boy who was almost hit by a van being driven, oddly enough, by a distracted driver.

Those are a couple of the reasons why the town of Oakville nominated Jim to be named Canada's Favourite Crossing Guard, an annual award presented by FedEx and Safe Kids Canada.

The award is designed to raise awareness of the important role crossing guards play in our community and how they prevent traffic injuries. Late last year, after supporting letters poured in from students and staff at St. Matthew's, Jim received word that he was one of the three awarded the title of Canada's Favourite Crossing Guard.

I'd like to congratulate Jim on his award and thank him for the dedication he brings to a job that many of us, and certainly many parents in our community, take for granted. After years of leading thousands of children across the road safely, the title of Canada's Favourite Crossing Guard is well deserved by a man like Jim Arnold.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise in the House today to alert members of how serious a problem is being faced by Ontario children's aid societies.

We all know, through our work in our own ridings, that the children's aids are collectively facing a deficit of almost \$55 billion. I understand that Ontario children's aid societies are going to get additional funding of \$26.9 million to help them survive the fiscal challenge—in fact, the Durham CAS's share is \$686,000.

The important part here—this is from our executive director, Wanda Secord, who says, “While this additional funding is a step in the right direction, we must emphasize that it is a band-aid solution.... This first step will merely delay some potentially devastating cuts, and it in no way begins to address the fundamental flaws in the funding framework that put us in this situation in the first place.”

I urge this government to look beyond short-term, temporary measures and address the real underlying framework problems. The government must ensure that not just Durham's children's aid but indeed all children's aids have the funding and resources they need to protect vulnerable children, families and youth.

Each member in the House should be standing up to protect the most vulnerable in their community. I am surprised and disappointed by the McGuinty government's lack of attention to this file.

1310

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm pleased to rise to give a special recognition to the many members of Toronto's Chinese communities in celebration of the Year of the Tiger. Yesterday, we had a big celebration at Central Commerce, in my riding of Trinity-Spadina, with performers from the riding and from across Toronto. It was a huge event, with multiple generations of Chinese and non-Chinese Canadians alike coming together for a common goal: to build friendship, share traditions and pay respect to the many people who make up our country.

I've been having Chinese lunar new year celebrations in my riding for a number of years now. This year, what struck me was how these celebrations have become a vital part of not just Chinese culture but Canadian culture.

I want to take a minute to name and give thanks to the artists, singers and dancers who performed yesterday.

Chinese waist drum dancers: Lin Wang, Nancy Xiao, Lisa Goo, Brenda Bin Su, Cindy Cubin Goo, Katie Wang, Linn Song and Lisa Zhang.

There was a vocal quartet called Geese from the North: Art Shen, James Wu, David Chen and Liping Cao.

There were other performers as well: musician Yuan Wang; singers Jing Hue Zhao and Man Fen Shi; soloists Liping Cao and Michelle Lu—Michelle was amazing, by the way; flute player Mr. Zhang; and the dancers from St. Stephen's Community House.

Happy Year of the Tiger.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Joe Dickson: Canada and the US have signed an important procurement agreement that is good news for Ontario. Our ability to bid on American and international products is vital to our economy. We rely heavily on accessing US markets to sell our goods and services. In fact, as an export-driven jurisdiction, most of our exports are shipped to the United States. Now, as a result of this agreement, we will have even greater access to US markets.

This agreement grants Canadian companies a waiver from buy-American restrictions. Ontario companies will gain access to approximately US\$65 billion worth of contracts. These opportunities will include a wide range of state and local projects, including those from the Departments of Energy and Housing, Urban Development and the Environmental Protection Agency. Being able to access these contracts will help strengthen Ontario's business, allowing them to expand their work, create more jobs and become more competitive.

That's why our government supports this procurement agreement. We know how important it is for our economy and our Ontario businesses. This agreement is a great opportunity for Ontario that will make our province even stronger and more prosperous.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: As you know, Speaker, our government is committed to helping Ontario students succeed in school and reach their aspirations, while also ensuring Ontario's long-term economic advantage by building a strong workforce.

To help accomplish this, the McGuinty government is starting full-day learning for up to 35,000 four- and five-year-olds in almost 600 schools across Ontario starting this September. Full-day kindergarten will better prepare our students for grade 1, giving them a better chance at finishing high school, continuing on to post-secondary

education and, of course, finding worthy and good employment later.

This program will start this September for up to 35,000 students in almost 1,400 classes across the province. We will continue to expand that enrolment, which is voluntary, until the program can be fully phased in for up to 240,000 four- and five-year-olds by 2015-16.

Parents will be able to enrol their four- and five-year-olds in an extended daycare program as well.

Programs like full-day kindergarten, as you know, are absolutely essential if we are going to build the workforce we need to compete in the new economy. By giving our kids an early start, we are setting them on the road to success and building a stronger Ontario.

Within my own riding of Etobicoke North, I can tell you that there's extraordinary excitement and anticipation for early engagement of our children.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today to speak about our local health integration networks.

Conservative members have made some confusing claims regarding the LHINs. For example, they have said that the LHINs received an exemption to the ban on sole-source contracts. This is not true. We found that the rules we inherited from the previous Conservative government regarding these contracts were inadequate, so we made them stronger. Sole-source consulting contracts are no longer permitted under our new rules.

But the members opposite didn't seem to understand that we strengthened government spending rules last year when they referred to the contract for Barry Monaghan. I would like to remind them that the rules governing Mr. Monaghan's contracts were set by the previous Conservative government. We have now corrected those policies to ensure that only the highest standards are followed.

There's one more perplexing claim I would like to set straight: The appointments to the LHINs are not based on donations to the Liberal Party. This is absolutely false, and nothing makes the point more clearly than the case of Mr. Monaghan. His donation history, as documented by Elections Ontario, shows that he once donated to a former Conservative MPP.

I would encourage my colleagues opposite to stop attacking the good people who serve Ontario's LHINs and start speaking out in support of our public health care system.

USE OF MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would remind all the members that when delivering their members' statements, it is to be a members' statement, and the statements should not be used as an opportunity to attack another member or another party for the point of view that they may wish to put across. I would just remind all members of that.

The member from Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my point of order was going to be precisely the point that you've made, and I thank you for making it. Members' statements have always been for the purpose of members making statements on matters that relate to their riding and matters of importance province-wide. To have a member stand in the House and to essentially make a statement on behalf of a ministry relating to government business and implicate in that statement a political party or other members in this House is wrong and out of order.

I thank you for drawing the member from Mississauga South's attention to that, and, I trust, all members of the government who would be tempted to read a statement clearly prepared by someone else who wanted to make a political point in this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member, and I have ruled on his point.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I beg leave to present a report on the Ontario Clean Water Agency from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I wish to start the debate on this particular matter.

This report on the Ontario Clean Water Agency refers to the December 2008 annual report of the Auditor General. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts held hearings on this report in April 2009, and we completed our work with regard to preparing the report in the fall of this year. The committee made five major recommendations.

I might add that the committee was quite supportive of OCWA, the Ontario Clean Water Agency, which takes care of many of the water and sewage systems, particularly in our small communities where they do not have the expertise or the number of households to justify running them on their own.

One of the major recommendations the committee made, which would go into the future and would enhance the work of all those in the province of Ontario who are engaged in providing us with clean water and taking care of our sewage, was a recommendation that the ministry make data on discharge, bypass and overflow exceedances available on its website. The ministry should provide a report specifying how this data will be measured, in part or in total, and how long it will take to post the data on the ministry website.

It's felt by the committee that if this information became public, then there would be much less chance of these exceedances occurring if everybody in the province knows about them in a timely manner.

With that, I will adjourn the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

1320

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I beg leave to present a report on adult institutional services from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I will open the debate by stating that the auditor's report of December 2008 contained a section—section 3.02—reporting on our adult institutional services. The committee and the public found that there were some alarming parts to that.

We heard from the ministry in March 2009, and are now presenting our report. The committee made 13 recommendations with regard to our adult services institutions. I want to outline three of those 13 recommendations.

One of them dealt with measures to discourage inmates from gaming the present system that we have. Evidently, inmates are declining to be transferred from facilities in Toronto to other facilities in order to secure two-for-one or three-for-one reductions in their sentences. We want the ministry to indicate to the committee how to discourage this practice.

As well, the committee wishes to have random alcohol and drug testing of inmates, and the ministry is to report to the committee as to whether it is prepared to make a regulation to authorize random alcohol and drug testing of inmates in Ontario, as is practised in other Canadian jurisdictions. If so, the ministry should indicate when it might authorize this.

As well, another very significant problem we have in our institutions is correctional officer absenteeism. I believe that sick days for each correctional officer now exceed 27 or 28. Therefore, we recommended that the ministry indicate to the committee the management targets and time frames of the adult institutional services division for reducing the average number of correctional officer sick days. The ministry is also asked to report this information by each institution, including the actions taken to improve working conditions at facilities with high levels of absenteeism.

These are three of the 13 recommendations that the committee made to the ministry. The committee believes that if the ministry takes action, we will have a better justice system and our inmates will be treated in a more consistent manner. Therefore, we recommend that all members of the Legislature read and support this report.

We look forward to seeing the responses of the ministry to this.

With that, I will adjourn the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ESSENTIAL PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICES ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LES SERVICES DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN ESSENTIELS

Mr. Caplan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 246, An Act to resolve public transit services labour disputes without strikes or lock-outs / Projet de loi 246, Loi visant à régler sans grève ni lock-out les conflits de travail au sein des services de transport en commun.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1324 to 1329.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Caplan has moved that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to resolve public transit services labour disputes without strikes or lockouts and that it now be read for the first time.

All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Balkissoon, Bas
Bentley, Christopher
Caplan, David
Chudleigh, Ted
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Gerretsen, John
Hoskins, Eric
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Johnson, Rick
Kular, Kuldip
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit
Martiniuk, Gerry
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm

Moridi, Reza
Munro, Julia
Naqvi, Yasir
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ruprecht, Tony
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Monique
Sousa, Charles
Van Bommel, Maria
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
Gélinas, France
Hampton, Howard

Kormos, Peter
Marchese, Rosario
Miller, Paul

Prue, Michael

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 39; the nays are 7.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. David Caplan: Whether one is a transit user or not, it is very vital to the health and economic well-being of our city and our province.

Since 1974, the TTC has had nine strikes and work-to-rule campaigns, including an illegal walkout in 2006, a two-day strike in 1999 and an eight-day job action in 1991.

If enacted, the Essential Public Transit Services Act will prohibit strikes and lockouts in connection with labour disputes between the Toronto Transit Commission and its employees, and will provide a means to resolve the disputes by arbitration.

This bill will also authorize the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations extending this regime to any other public transit service.

Quite frankly, enough is enough. Citizens all over the city have been left stranded too many times. It's time to regain their trust. I believe that making public transit services like the TTC an essential service will do just that. Reliable public transit services are fundamental to our city and our province as a whole.

ZERO WASTE DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA JOURNÉE "ZÉRO DÉCHET"

Mr. Kular moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 247, An Act to proclaim Zero Waste Day / Projet de loi 247, Loi proclamant la Journée "zéro déchet".

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: This bill, if enacted, proclaims the Wednesday of the third week of October each year as Zero Waste Day. The concept of zero waste is to reduce the impact of our everyday lives on the natural environment as much as is humanly possible through conservation and waste reduction.

In declaring Zero Waste Day during Waste Reduction Week, Ontario would be helping to encourage students, employees and each citizen to reduce the waste created through their everyday activities for just one day. This one day of action would illustrate the power we have as individuals and our collective power as a society to protect our natural environment from unnecessary pollution.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It is a pleasure to present petitions on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. I have a number of varied topics here. I'll just read this first one here; it reads as follows:

“Whereas the proposed harmonization of the Ontario retail sales tax (RST) with the federal GST has the potential to increase costs to many small businesses and their customers; and

“Whereas these added costs would have a devastating impact in difficult economic times, and organizations such as the Ontario Home Builders’ Association have estimated harmonization would add \$15,000 in new taxes to the price of a new Ontario home;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, reject the harmonization of the GST and the RST unless there are exemptions to offset the adverse impacts of harmonization, so that the outcome will be a reduction in red tape, not higher taxes.”

I’m pleased to sign in support and present this to one of the new pages, Jordan.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: It’s my pleasure to present this petition from the people of Algoma-Manitoulin, adding their voices to 12,600 people. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government is making positron emission tomography, PET scanning, a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients ... and

“Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks’ table with page Nevan.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. John O’Toole: Again the people of Durham have spoken up, and I have more petitions here. They read as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is conducting a review of the province’s underserved area program (UAP) that may result in numerous communities across rural and small-town Ontario losing financial incentives to recruit and retain much-needed doctors; and

“Whereas financial incentives to attract and keep doctors are essential to providing quality front-line health care services, particularly in small communities” like Cambridge; and

“Whereas people across Ontario have been forced to pay Dalton McGuinty’s now-forgotten health tax since 2004, expecting health care services to be improved rather than cut; and

“Whereas taxpayers deserve good value for their hard-earned money that goes into health care, unlike the wasteful and abusive spending under the McGuinty Liberals’ watch at eHealth Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government not reduce or eliminate financial incentives rural communities and small towns need to attract and retain doctors” to their communities.

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present it to Christopher, one of the pages here.

IMPÔTS FONCIERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’ai une pétition qui nous vient d’un quartier de Sudbury et qui dit :

« Puisque 2009 est une année de réévaluation dans la province de l’Ontario; et

« Puisque les réévaluations seront appliquées graduellement au courant de quatre ans, de 2009 à 2012; et

« Puisque les valeurs imposables pour les valeurs actuelles recueillies dès le 1^{er} janvier 2008 ont été obtenues au courant des années de biens immobiliers actifs; et

« Puisque le passage à la phase descendante du climat économique mondial a eu un effet sur le marché des biens immobiliers et, subséquemment, les valeurs imposables dans la province de l’Ontario;

« Nous, les soussignés, présentons la requête suivante à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Que le ministre des Finances pour la province de l’Ontario ramène les valeurs imposables à l’année de base du 1^{er} janvier 2005. »

J’appuie cette pétition, j’y ajoute ma signature, et je la confie à la page, Sarah.

1340

POWER PLANT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the province of Ontario, through the Ontario Energy Board, has selected a location for a gas-fired electrical generating power station within three kilometres of 16 schools and more than 11,000 homes; and

“Whereas the Oakville-Clarkson airshed is already one of the most polluted in Canada; and

“Whereas no independent environmental assessment”—no independent environmental assessment—“has been completed for this proposed building location; and

“Whereas Ontario has experienced a significant reduction in demand for electrical power” and we don’t even know if the power plant is needed; and

“Whereas a recent accident at a power plant in Connecticut demonstrated the dangers that nearby residents face;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to immediately rescind the existing plan to build a power plant at or near the current planned location on lands owned by the Ford Motor Co. on Royal Windsor Drive in Oakville and initiate a complete review of area power needs and potential building sites, including environmental assessments and a realistic assessment of required danger zone buffer areas."

I'm pleased to sign this petition.

TAXATION

M^{me} France G  linas: It's my pleasure to present this petition from 60 people from the community of Foleyet. Foleyet is very tiny, so 60 people is a big majority of the residents. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario has lost 171,000 jobs since October and over 300,000 manufacturing and resource sector jobs since 2004; and

"Whereas many families are facing the threat of layoffs or reduced hours; and

"Whereas, rather than introducing a plan to sustain jobs and put Ontario's economy back on track, Dalton McGuinty and his government chose to slap an 8% tax on everyday purchases while giving profitable corporations a \$2-billion income tax cut;

"Be it resolved that" they petition "the Legislature to cancel the scheduled implementation of sales tax harmonization."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Christopher.

TAXATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in the health tax, the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: arena ice, soccer and baseball field rentals; gasoline; cellphone bills; home heating oil and electricity; gym fees; golf green fees; ski lift tickets; movie theatre and event admission fees; Internet services; boat rentals, fishing licences, charters and wood for the campfire; home renovations; and real estate transactions;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes, once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I affix my name in full support.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further petitions, I just want to take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Newmarket-Aurora, to welcome students from Huron Heights school in Newmarket and their teacher, Mr. Karl Hamid, to the Legislature today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the federal government to invest in the future success of Ontarians and recognize that Canada's success depends on a strong and competitive Ontario. Ontario calls on the federal government to support Ontarians in budget 2010 by:

—ensuring current and future transfer payments that support services Ontarians rely on are protected, even as the federal deficit is addressed;

—committing to the renewal of health care funding agreements before they expire and to the growth of health transfers at the real rate of health care expenditure;

—positioning Canada as a global leader on the environment by supporting Ontario's burgeoning green economy through such things as a cap-and-trade program that will support jobs and investment in Ontario, and investing a fair share in Ontario's clean energy initiatives;

—investing in our people and positioning them for good jobs by living up to the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement and ending the current shortchanging of new Canadians who come to Ontario;

—continuing to partner with Ontarians by strengthening investments in post-secondary education and training programs that build workers' skills and knowledge for today and tomorrow; and

—providing stability to the thousands of Ontario families who rely on child care spaces created with federal funding by continuing to fund those quality child care spaces for Ontario children.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion number 172. Debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I rise today as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs—and am very proud to do so in my first official capacity as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs—to speak to this resolution which is so very important to the people of Ontario.

I want to talk today about the road forward for our province and for our country. As we await the federal budget next week, and they continue to weigh what are tough choices in the 2010 budget and we continue to weigh what are tough choices for our government as we face our 2010 budget, this is an important opportunity to take stock of where we all stand.

The fact is that the horizon looks very different this year than it did last year. Last year was about here and now; it was about protecting jobs. We were urgently trying to do everything we could to protect our economy, our jobs, our hard-working families from the ravages of a brutal global economic storm.

I am proud to say that we worked in partnership with the federal government to create and protect jobs with unprecedented infrastructure stimulus investments and support for Ontario's auto sector. We also worked in partnership with our federal cousins to help enhance Ontario's future competitiveness with the harmonized sales tax. I think it's fair to say it was thanks to this strong partnership that we averted the most ominous projections. This was a significant achievement and it demonstrates just how effective our two governments can be when we put aside any differences and instead focus solely on doing what is best for Ontarians and Canadians.

But today is no time to be satisfied with past accomplishments. Today is no time to take comfort in the sense that the worst of the economic downturn is behind us, because today we face new challenges. Where last year we faced down the here and now, we must now resolve to do what it takes to confront the long-term challenges we all face together. The fact is that those unprecedented infrastructure investments, combined with a significant decrease in tax revenues, means that Ontario, just like the federal government, other provincial governments and, indeed, other governments all around the world, is facing a substantial long-term deficit.

There will be some who see this deficit as just too daunting, too big, too scary. Indeed, some in this chamber, in particular, have resorted to all manners of talk of doom and gloom. We do not see it that way. We do not recoil, pull back and hide under the covers. We do not think of all the things that the government should stop doing. Instead, we think of the things that the government must do.

There is no doubt that the deficit presents us with a significant challenge, as it does all levels of government, but Ontarians don't think that this is any reason to throw up our hands in despair. Ontarians know that this is the time to push forward with vision, passion and confidence that we can turn things around. This is the time to come up with new ideas, new solutions and new ways of doing things that will enable our great province and our great country to not merely go back to where we were before the economic storm blew through but to emerge re-invigorated with new goals, new aspirations and an even brighter future. Ontario has a plan to do just that, but we can't do it alone.

Just as we came together to confront the immediate challenge of the global economic downturn, so too do we need to come together with the federal government today to create good jobs and strengthen the things that Ontario families rely on over the long term. Because if one thing is for certain, it's that we can't go back to the way things were before the economic downturn. The reality is that change is upon us, and if we want Ontario and Canada to

remain strong, we must change too. The future success of all Ontarians and all Canadians depends on it. That's why our government has been working hard delivering new solutions. In the past year alone, we have launched a number of initiatives that are going to deliver results now and over the long term.

1350

First off, as I mentioned earlier, we're working in partnership with the federal government to transition to the harmonized sales tax. That will increase our competitiveness by providing businesses with incentives to invest and create jobs. And today, this afternoon, in my riding in North Bay, we are hosting a federal and provincial Ministry of Revenue seminar for small and mid-sized businesses, to help our businesses come to grips with the changes before them and to help them through a stable and easy transition into the new HST, and I'm delighted that the Ministry of Revenue for the province and Revenue Canada representatives are both there to answer the questions of my small and mid-size businesses in North Bay. It's another indication of how both our levels of government are working together to make sure that this important initiative that means so much to the economy of Ontario is provided with enough information for the transition to take place in a very easy way for our employers across the province.

Secondly, we're putting Ontario ahead of the curve in the emerging green economy and attracting new investment, jobs and economic growth, while also protecting our environment, combatting climate change and creating a healthier future for generations to come. Again, a great example in my community of two small businesses that are taking off: one that's installing solar panels on homes in North Bay and another that is creating wind power initiatives around our region. Both are very excited about the government initiatives, about the Green Energy Act, and about all the investment and focus that we've put on climate change and on green energy here in Ontario. We are at the cutting edge, as the opposition knows but is too resentful to actually admit.

Third, we're implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, to give our kids the strongest possible start in school and create an even better-educated workforce so that Ontario enhances its competitiveness for generations to come. Madam Speaker, here again, as you know, all of the experts have indicated that early learning is so very, very critical to our children and to our future workforce.

I'm incredibly proud to be part of a government that's moving forward with four- and five-year-old all-day learning, because as I look at my niece who is seven and my nephew who is three, I just see what great human sponges they are and how much information they can take in, and I just think that this initiative is going to be so important for all of those young children across the province and for creating a workforce that is incredibly competitive in the world. We know that our strongest resource here in the province of Ontario and in Canada is our workforce, so what better way to invest in that

resource than to be providing four- and five-year-olds with full-day learning?

Finally, we're doing what it takes to provide the highest-quality public services like health care that our families rely on perhaps more than ever when times are tough.

We fully acknowledge that we are going to have to make some tough choices to put our fiscal house back in order, but we will never fail to deliver on the things that our families count on. We will not use the deficit as a reason to shy away from making big decisions or launching new programs that make sense. We will not succumb to the doom and gloom that says government should do less. Simply put, we will continue to push forward with a concrete plan that gives Ontarians some very real reasons to feel optimistic about the future.

And yet we recognize that many Ontarians are apprehensive about the road ahead. They are apprehensive about the federal government and its consideration of cutting health care funding to their communities. They are apprehensive that the federal government has no plan to create a real national child care program, and I have heard, as has the member for Haliburton and as I'm sure many members in this House have, from the local child care providers, who are very concerned about the changes in federal funding to child care and wanting to see the federal government play its fair share in that role across the country. They are apprehensive that the federal government has fallen short when it comes to a comprehensive plan to deal with climate change. And yes, they are apprehensive about their jobs and their future prosperity.

We can, and we must, calm these anxieties, and there's every reason to believe that, working together, we can calm those anxieties, because we're not starting from scratch. We have a history of working together with the federal government to produce great results for Ontarians, results that benefit the entire country.

Those results include much-needed infrastructure investment. You'll know that over the last year and a half we've been investing greatly in infrastructure in all of the communities across the province, and certainly mine has been a beneficiary. We've seen some great investments in roads and bridges in some of my smaller rural communities and a great sportsplex that the city of North Bay has been looking for for the past six or seven years and that is now moving forward, thanks to the partnership of all three levels of government: the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

We're seeing investment in rural areas that we have not seen before that's creating jobs and making sure that our economies locally are continuing to move forward and to thrive.

We've also seen, as a result of our partnership with the federal government, a regional development agency for southern Ontario created, financial support for Ontario's auto sector and enhanced competitiveness with the harmonized sales tax.

We also know that for the past few years we've made real progress in addressing Ontario's fairness concerns and have achieved significant gains for our province. You'll remember, Madam Speaker, that a few years back we did a full-on fairness campaign, and we really did try to bring our federal partners to the table to discuss what Ontario needed and how we were not being treated fairly within Confederation.

We were quite successful in those discussions. A number of examples of the changes that have occurred include the federal government's making changes to the employment insurance program in its 2009 budget that went some way toward addressing the needs of Ontario's unemployed workers. Between 2009 and 2011, Ontario will receive over \$600 million in new labour market funding, which we are using to support unemployed and underemployed Ontario workers.

In 2009, five years earlier than was planned by the federal government, Ontario began receiving the same per capita cash that all equalization-receiving provinces receive under the Canada health transfer. Also in 2009, the federal government made changes to federal programs, including improvements to the national child benefit supplement and the Canada child tax benefit, and enhancements to the working income tax benefit that complement Ontario's poverty reduction strategy. In 2007, the federal government agreed to fund the Canada social transfer on a per capita basis, again providing Ontario with the fair treatment we had been seeking.

We have every reason to believe we can build on these gains and take the next giant leap forward. I believe that the best way to do it is to show Ontarians and Canadians that, regardless of which level of government we represent, we are optimistic about the future and our ability to meet the needs and expectations of the citizens we serve.

This afternoon, I would like to outline six specific ways that we can achieve this partnership, this sense of balance and fairness. First, I want to talk about protecting public services. The federal government needs to ensure that current and future transfer payments that support services that Ontarians rely on are protected, even as the federal deficit is addressed. Ontario has had considerable success in achieving fairness when it comes to federal transfers to the province, as I just outlined.

Ontario and the federal government have worked well together recently to deliver job creation and economic transformation through significant economic stimulus and infrastructure investments, and financial support for Ontario's auto sector. We've seen progress on federal funding to Ontario in key areas such as health care, infrastructure and regional economic development, important programs that affect everyone. We need to acknowledge the vital role that social and health programs, and other services that are partly funded through federal transfers, play in the lives of Ontarians.

The federal government has a responsibility to hold up its end of the bargain in the funding partnerships that we have in place. Now is not the time for the federal govern-

ment to shrink from its responsibility to share in funding these services. Ontarians want to know that their federal government won't use the deficit as a rationale for reducing the services that individuals and families rely on. Ontario wants a commitment from the federal government that it will maintain its promise not to cut transfers to provinces.

While we have a group of young people in our public gallery today—hello; we're glad you're here—I want to talk a little about a couple of issues that I'm sure are of interest to you before you leave. I know that you're not going to stay for the entire speech, but I want to talk about a few things that I know are of interest to future generations and our future workforce.

Let's talk about creating green jobs. The federal government can do so much more to help position Canada as a global leader on the environment by supporting Ontario's burgeoning green economy through things such as a cap-and-trade program and by investing a fair share in Ontario's clean energy initiatives that support jobs and investments.

Premier McGuinty has made building the green economy a hallmark of our government. Our Green Energy Act is putting us in a leadership position in building a green economy, and I'm sure our young people would agree that this is where we want to be. Yes, I'm getting nods from the guys upstairs. Thank you.

We want to be at the cutting edge, and I think we are at the cutting edge. Our Green Energy Act will put Ontario at the forefront of renewable energy and create 50,000 direct and indirect jobs over the next three years—16,000 jobs alone in the agreement with Samsung. These are jobs that these young people here today could be looking to in the future, green jobs that are incredibly important, both for the environment and for our future workforce.

Ontario is already Canada's leader in wind power. Where we had 10 turbines in 2003, we've now got over 670 and counting, producing enough electricity to power 300,000 homes.

1400

As I noted earlier, I have one wonderful young entrepreneur in my riding who's working on wind energy and who was in talking to me probably at the time when we only had 10 wind turbines in the province, and was certainly on the cutting edge in our region, and has been talking to me about the need for more transmission lines so that we can harness all of the power that we have in northern Ontario and to help solve the problems of southern Ontario. We're moving forward with that new transmission and with the ability to start to harness the great natural resources that we have in my home area of northern Ontario.

So far the federal government has made significant investments in carbon capture and storage technologies, but fewer comparable investments that would assist in the green transformation of Ontario.

As many in this House would know, the carbon capture and storage technologies are being researched

and mostly are found in the western provinces. We'd like to see the federal government show that similar kind of support to the province of Ontario and our green initiatives, and look at a cap-and-trade program, which we think is incredibly important for the future on climate change.

We want the federal government to invest in reducing emissions by supporting the research, development and commercialization of green technologies, such as smart grid technology, in Ontario.

I note that our young people are heading out for the rest of their tour. We thank you for being with us today, and we hope to see you again some day. Come and visit us as we move forward with our green technology and our green future for Ontario.

The third point I'd like to make is to talk about strengthening health care. The federal government should commit to the renewal of long-term health care funding agreements before they expire and growing health care transfers at the real rate of health expenditures.

Ontario, as you know, is investing strategically to continue to transform the health care sector to meet the future needs of Ontarians, and the results are there for everyone to see. Wait times are shorter across the province. It's easier to find a doctor. Eight hundred thousand Ontarians who didn't have access to a doctor in 2003 have one now. Through Health Care Connect, we're helping to connect doctors and other health professionals with individuals.

In my riding, a few of the issues that I heard so much about when I was first elected now seem to have waned, as far as pressure points in my riding.

I remember in my first couple of years in office having so many calls from individuals who were on wait-lists for hip and knee replacements. I think everyone in this House probably had similar calls from individuals who were in pain and who wanted to have their health issues addressed, but the resources weren't in place to help them. Now we see that wait times for all of those surgeries have been reduced across the province. I no longer get those calls. In fact, I had a friend who jokingly told me last year that he wasn't ready to go when they called him because it happened so quickly compared to what he was expecting. That's a good-news story. I think that we can see a real benefit to Ontarians across the province as we see these wait times being reduced and the strategic investments that we've made through our federal health transfer payments into the province, which have allowed us to really improve the quality of life for Ontarians across the province.

Another pressure point in my riding was the ability to find a doctor. I used to get a lot of calls. I still get some calls. Certainly there are still not enough doctors in our northern region, but we are seeing progress. Through our family health teams and through the addition of various health professionals into these teams, we are seeing families getting health care closer to home and in a much more timely way than they had in the past.

There are also 10,000 more nursing positions since 2003 in the province. Again, an area that I'm pretty

familiar with and very proud of is our work in supporting our nurses in our long-term-care homes. We've certainly seen substantial investments in our long-term-care homes, and we've seen a great deal of increased capacity for our personal support workers, our nurse practitioners and our nursing staff in our long-term-care homes.

So I think the people of Ontario really have benefited from these investments. We want to make sure that the federal health transfer payments keep up to the actual expenditures that we have in the province, and that we are able to maintain those health care levels we've had in the past and that people have come to appreciate and rely on.

We appreciate the federal government's actions over the last few years to address inequities in funding to provinces for health care.

Health is a major priority for citizens across Ontario and across the country—

Interjection.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: —and I know that it is for the people of Simcoe North as well, despite the fact that the member doesn't seem to really want to listen.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Member from Simcoe North.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Changing demands due to population growth and aging are a common challenge to governments as we continue to ensure the highest-quality services for our citizens. Madam Speaker, I think as you know and everyone knows in this House and certainly across the province, we have an aging population. Our concerns in health care are only going to continue to grow, and we need to be able to manage the demand that we have, and we need to be able to rely on our federal cousins to provide us with the support that we need to ensure that health care is there in our communities across the province when needed. The federal government is a necessary partner to provinces in ensuring our health services are in place across the province.

Our fourth point is the need to support new Canadians. The federal government must live up to the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement by ending the current short-changing of new Canadians who come to Ontario. Immigration in Ontario is critical to our labour force, growth and to our economy, perhaps more than anywhere else in Canada. Despite the 2005 Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, federal spending per immigrant in Ontario is less than in some provinces. During the first four years of the agreement, the federal government has underspent in Ontario by \$193 million. This is incredibly important. That's investment that could be made in a variety of communities that are seeking to increase immigration to their areas.

We have a great area of growth around the GTA, but in areas like mine, in North Bay, we are looking towards the future, and we are looking towards immigration as a possible growth component for our community. The city of North Bay and its economic development office have

really undertaken to bolster the resources that we have available to new Canadians to make it a more welcoming environment. We have a new multicultural centre in North Bay that has been up and running for the last couple of years. It has settlement programs, and it assists newcomers to our community to find the resources they need within our community.

We are providing resources to new Canadians through Web-based enterprises that allow them to see what's available in a community. In mine, we just launched a portal through some federal and provincial funding about a month ago. It was really exciting. There were so many community partners that came out for the launch of the portal, and you get to see how many people are involved in assisting newcomers to the community, to settle in the community.

The portal provided them with all kinds of really practical information, so that if you logged in from anywhere in the world, you could find out what you needed to know to arrive in Canada or arrive in North Bay in the middle of February. It would tell you what the weather was like. It would tell you what kind of daycare was available, what kind of health care was available, what social services were available, what kind of welcome you could look to receive, what job opportunities were available, what companies were based in North Bay, and what types of employment and education were available in North Bay. We have both Canadore College and Nipissing University, which provide some excellent post-secondary education. We also have the North Bay Literacy Council, which provides assistance in basic literacy and numeracy for those who are coming and feel that they have a language barrier as they move into the workforce. And we have a number of partners that come together in providing workforce support. In the area, we have Yes! Employment Services. We have a number of social agencies that combine to provide particularly new Canadians with the support that they need.

Just last week, I was at the International Food Fest up at Nipissing University, which is in support of the World University Service of Canada, and that was a great celebration. It was a partnership with our multicultural centre to celebrate all the different nationalities that are present in our community, either on the university and college campuses or in our community itself, at large. It was a great opportunity. There were 600 people there. There was some great food, as it was an international food festival. But it was also a great opportunity to see how diverse our community is and what supports are there to help them.

We know that it's incredibly important that that \$193 million that was underspent by the federal government in Ontario could have been spent to assist more people to find their way to places like North Bay or help other communities, such as those in Simcoe or in Parry Sound-Muskoka, to develop their Web portals and to become more visible to potential new Canadians, and also to provide those communities with more assistance to welcome new Canadians across the province.

We need to renegotiate the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, and we want the federal government to devolve settlement and language training services to Ontario to ensure better services for the newcomers. Again, we feel that there isn't a need for duplication of services or for different organizations to be working at cross-purposes. We need to streamline those services to ensure that we are using the precious resources that we have to their fullest extent, but as well that we are ensuring that it's one-stop shopping for those new Canadians and that they can find all of the services they need without too much difficulty. Because as we all know, going to a new place is challenging, and we want to make sure that they feel as welcome as possible in Ontario and certainly as welcome as they would in any other part of the country, which is why we want to make sure that Ontario gets its fair share through the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement.

1410

Another area that I was hoping to speak to a little bit while our young people were still with us—oh, we've got some even younger people on this side; welcome to the House today—we want to talk about skills training. The federal government needs to continue to partner with Ontarians by strengthening investment in post-secondary education and training programs that build workers' skills and knowledge for today and tomorrow. While our visitors today are probably a little young to be entering into skills training, they will someday be looking at the trades, we hope, and at a variety of educational opportunities in Ontario, and we want to make sure that those educational opportunities are available to them.

We're proud of the investments that we've made to strengthen post-secondary education and training as part of our Reaching Higher plan. We will create more than 15,000 new graduate spaces by 2011-12. There are 120,000 apprentices learning a trade today, nearly double the number that existed in 2003. Again, I can attest to the validity of these numbers and to the investments that we've made, because at Canadore College, we are seeing our apprenticeship programs burgeoning and we are also seeing new graduate programs invested in at Nipissing University, both of which I'm very proud to see happening.

Since 2003, 100,000 more students have been attending our colleges and universities. That's a tremendous increase, and those numbers will only grow in the future. We are seeking greater federal support for post-secondary education funding in recognition of our growing enrolment costs. As we continue to see our numbers climb in our post-secondary institutions, we know that the costs will also increase with those enrolments. We need to make sure that the investments are there and that our students are getting the proper education they deserve through these post-secondary institutions.

As I said earlier in the address, we know that our workforce is one of our most important resources. While we are starting early with four- and five-year-old full-day

learning, we also need to make sure that our older students have what is needed to continue their education and to make them into the strongest workforce we possibly can.

Despite what we have accomplished together, Ontario workers will now benefit from increased federal spending for worker training programs. Ottawa's support for post-secondary education as a whole has been slipping across the country relative to the rising costs of post-secondary education. As I said, more needs to be done. Federal support should ensure today's students get the training they need to be skilled workers tomorrow and help keep Ontario and Canada globally competitive.

At Nipissing University and Canadore College, we have seen some substantial investments made through our provincial funding, and some as well through the infrastructure funding that we saw through the partnership of the federal and provincial governments. I was delighted to see that more is being spent on Canadore College and on Nipissing University. We are making a substantial provincial investment in the library at Nipissing University and Canadore College, which is a joint library because my two institutions are co-located—I think the only institutions across the province that are co-located—which provides a great synergy as well as a great melding of resources and support to both institutions.

I'm particularly proud of our learning library at Canadore and Nipissing because Nipissing University has historically been ranked one of the best schools in the country by students in the "smaller university" category, and the one mark on every scorecard that ranks low is the library. So they have come together at Canadore and Nipissing to work to invest in this learning library for both schools, which are on the same campus.

They came to me a few years ago very committed to this project. It was wonderful to see both institutions clearly indicate that this was their top priority for infrastructure moving forward. I was delighted to be able to announce in 2008 that we were moving forward with the project, and as I drove by just last week, I saw the scaffolding and the walls going up. It's going to be an incredible asset to the campus and to the whole community, because our local, small rural libraries are also hooked up to the university library through a province-wide program. I know that our small libraries really appreciate the resources and the assistance that they get through the larger university and college library. It's a great partnership; it's a great investment. I really think we need to push the federal government to continue to invest in what is the future of the country and the future of this province, and that is our young people and our post-secondary education.

Finally, I want to speak to child care. The federal government needs to step up and provide stability to the thousands of Ontario families who rely on child care spaces created with federal funding by continuing to fund those quality child care spaces for Ontario children. I know you agree with me, Madam Speaker, because I've

heard you speak passionately on the child care issue before. This is an important issue to all Ontarians. We think the federal government should step up to the plate and pay their fair share on this particular file.

Support for Ontario families, especially working parents with young children, in these challenging economic times is a priority for our government. Expanded child care will enable working parents to more fully participate in the labour market. We were able to provide stability in the child care sector this fiscal year through additional provincial funding and by using the last federal payment under the old early learning and child care agreement.

It is absolutely critical that the federal government initiate new funding measures to support provincial child care spaces. I'm sure you've heard from your local child care providers. I know I've heard from mine. I think I've got a meeting scheduled next week with the local child care coalition. They are pushing hard, and they want to make sure that the places they have in place now will be there in the future for the children who need them and for the families who need them. I think we all know, through our four- and five-year-old learning program, that we are going to free up some child care spaces because we'll have more children in a different program. But, certainly, we need the federal government to step up to the plate and support the child care that they initially put in place. It's not something that they should be able to walk away from. This is incredibly important to families across the province, and I want to ensure that they are coming to the support of families across the province and, by extension, across the country.

I want to make one thing very clear: This is all about recognizing that Canada's success depends on a strong and competitive Ontario. I know we've made this point time and again. Ontario is a driving force in Canada. Other provinces may disagree, but I think we recognize that in having the bulk of the population and having a large manufacturing base and a large financial base, Ontario is the driving force in Canada, and with our success comes Canada's success. We need to ensure our success by ensuring that the federal government is making investments in an appropriate way in Ontario, ensuring that we can continue to provide the services Ontarians need in the six areas that I've discussed, as well as a variety of other areas where we know the federal government plays an important role.

Today, however, I am focusing on the six areas of transfer payments, child care, climate change, post-secondary education, and immigration. These are areas that are of key importance to us and where we feel the federal government can make substantial investment and can assist the province in providing the services that our citizens have come to expect across the province. We believe that it's about all levels of government resolving to do what it takes to invest in the future success of Ontario families. Perhaps more than that, it's simply about accepting the fact that we're all in this together and we need to find a way forward together.

Ontarians need to see the right signals from the federal government. As you know, next week the federal government is coming out with its throne speech on Wednesday and its budget on Thursday, March 4. We look forward to listening to both of those addresses and to seeing what direction the federal government is planning on taking. Specifically, however, we hope to see in the federal budget some recognition of these six primary issues, as well as other funding opportunities for the province.

We've been working very closely with the federal government over the last couple of years, as we've made substantial investments across our communities. As well, I should note that we've worked with all three levels of government. The municipal governments have been very much involved in many of the infrastructure funding programs that we have introduced over the last couple of years in partnership with the federal government. So in probably the majority of our funding programs, we've worked with all three levels of government together, and that has really allowed us to move forward with a number of projects that otherwise would not have moved forward.

I've talked in this House before about a community in my riding, the township of Chisholm. It has 18 bridges, all of which are in different states of disrepair. Certainly, with the rate base that Chisholm has, it could not afford to repair those bridges in any kind of timely manner. With the investments that we've made in partnership with the federal government and the municipality, they've been able to move forward on a number of urgent projects and have been able to kind of profile and prepare for the coming bridges and other projects that they have in the queue. It has given them some hope.

1420

I have to say that when I was first elected, one of my more memorable trips to Chisholm was a visit with the mayor, as well as the head of public works, where we put on our rubber boots and walked around a number of these bridges so that I could get a first-hand look at the decay and the need. It was very telling. Some of these bridges are the main link for individuals in Chisholm to the main highways and into communities, and their main link to getting their groceries and getting their health care. They are very important links in our rural communities. And Chisholm is not alone; there are rural communities across the province that are facing similar cases, not of despair, but certainly they were feeling a great deal of concern about how they were going to address these needs.

I know the Rural Ontario Municipalities Association is meeting today in Toronto. I'm sure that my colleagues are hearing concerns again from our rural municipal partners about some of the infrastructure issues. But certainly I know, because I spoke to a couple of my colleagues this morning who were in meetings, that they're also hearing some thanks from our rural municipalities who recognize that without the investments we have made across the province, they would not be in the position they're in today, which is to be opening new bridges and roads, making repairs and providing the services they

need to provide to their taxpayers in the municipal and rural areas across the province.

Ontarians, as I said, need to see the right signals from the federal government. We need to see the federal government recognize the fierce urgency of the situation, just as it did when we were in the midst of the economic storm last year. Last year, everyone recognized that we were in the here and now, that we needed to address the situation we faced immediately, that people were losing their jobs and that people were feeling incredibly uncertain about the future. We came together and made investments in infrastructure that created jobs in communities across the province and kept our economy moving forward.

Now we see ourselves coming out on the other side of the economic storm, but we can't lose sight of the fact that we all face a long-term burden and we need to address that. While we do recognize that the federal government has wanted to address its deficit, it also cannot lose sight of the fact that it needs to continue to make investments in the province and in the programs that Ontarians have come to rely on.

We need to see the federal government face the urgency of the situation. Ontarians accept that all levels of government are going to have to make some tough choices on the long road to recovery, but they don't accept the idea that the deficit is a reason to shy away from the positive things their governments can do. That is why the McGuinty government will continue to look for opportunities to partner with the federal government, and we will also continue to stand up for the fairness that Ontario deserves.

So as I spoke today of the programs we partner in with the federal government, and have partnered in, I also spoke about the fairness that we think we are entitled to. We have done great things on infrastructure, and we've done great things working in partnership with the federal government on a number of programs. But we also want to ensure, as we move forward with the HST and as we move forward with these infrastructure projects that are creating jobs and creating economic activity across the province, that in those areas where the federal government has fallen behind—where we know they've fallen behind and we know they need to step up to the plate—we need to make sure they are not falling behind on transfer payments and that they do not see their role in deficit reduction as one that would allow them to reduce their deficit on the backs of provincial governments and on the backs of provincial programs that rely so heavily on transfer payments. We want to protect our public services. We feel that the federal government needs to ensure that current and future transfer payments that support our public services are protected.

We want to make sure that health care is there when needed in every community across the province. We want to ensure that our young people are receiving the education they deserve across the province. We think that early learning for four- and five-year-olds is incredibly important. We don't want to come away from that; we

want to move forward with that, because the children of the province are the future and their education is incredibly important for the future well-being of the province and for the economic development of the province.

We want to ensure that our post-secondary education continues to be funded at the level that is required. We want to make sure that we are at the cutting edge of post-secondary education and that we are continuing to graduate young people who are at the cutting edge of their fields.

Madam Speaker, let me just digress for a moment and tell you about an experience I recently had. As Minister of Tourism for the last year and a half, I was very much involved in preparing for Ontario's presence at the Vancouver Olympics. One of the things we are showcasing at the Olympics is some new technology that was developed by the students at Sheridan College. It's called Sheridan 3D. It's an incredible gaming opportunity. The students at Sheridan have partnered with BlackBerry and with a manufacturer in Ontario that manufactures 3D screens that don't require 3D glasses. We were showcasing this in our pavilion in Vancouver. It was a really great way to showcase how Ontario technology and our Ontario students have come together.

Through the Sheridan College program, we are graduating some incredibly bright students and some incredibly digital-savvy students who are on the cutting edge of their field. Those graduates and the programs that we've developed across the province have allowed us to attract investments like Ubisoft, a major gaming company worldwide, which has found Ontario as a good place to invest and to grow because we have this workforce here that's available to them that is at the cutting edge of their field.

We were delighted to be able to showcase the students of Sheridan out in Vancouver to the world. I think it's a wonderful opportunity to indicate to the world that we are at the cutting edge and that our students are getting that state-of-the-art education that's required to make us as a province, and them as a workforce, competitive in the world.

Again, on the federal front, we want to make sure that they are continuing to strengthen our health care by providing us with the resources that we need to continue to deliver on the results that we have delivered on. I think we spoke about this earlier, but I want to emphasize it. The wait times are shorter. We have people who are finding doctors a lot quicker. We have more nurses out in the field. We recognize that we have challenges ahead in the health care field, particularly with an aging population. We need to be ready for that, and we need to partner with the federal government to ensure that our health care services are available across the province.

I want to, just for a moment, talk again about green jobs and creating green energy in the province. Our Green Energy Act is putting us in a leadership position in building a green economy. We are first in class in North America with our Green Energy Act. We are attracting investment from around the world because of the table

that we have set with our Green Energy Act and other investments that we've made in renewable energy across the province.

As I said, even in my small community of North Bay, we see those investments starting to pay off when we see young entrepreneurs taking charge. I had one professor at Canadore College who has been harping at me for quite some time about investment in green energy in the college so that they can prepare the workforce for the future who will need to go and implement the green energy technology that's being developed today. Certainly, that's a forward-thinking professor and someone who's going to take the college far.

Through our Green Energy Act, we will be creating 50,000 direct and indirect jobs over the next three years. This is incredibly important for our young people. They're very concerned about the environment. The blending of our green energy initiatives together with the job creation, I think, is going to create some incredible employment that our young people are looking for. A happy workforce is the best workforce. We're going to have young people who are engaged in jobs that they are excited about and that they know are at the cutting edge of technology around the world.

Our federal government has made significant investments, as I said, in some technology that is mostly situated in our western provinces. We want to see the federal government come to the table and support technology and green ideas that are being developed right here in Ontario. We feel that we are entitled to that share of our green energy investments from the federal government. We are at the cutting edge. We are a jurisdiction that's moving forward together with a number of other provinces, but we want to see the investments spread out fairly across the country and not just in the west.

Again, support for new Canadians is incredibly important, as well as skills training. We want to see those investments being made in the future of our citizens of Ontario. We want to make sure those who choose to situate themselves in Ontario are not treated unfairly or at a disadvantage to those new Canadians who find themselves attracted to other provinces. We want to ensure that we have the resources available to attract new Canadians to Ontario and also the resources available to help support them once they're in the community because, as you know so well from your area of Toronto and as we know in other remote areas, it's incredibly important for our citizens to feel welcome and comfortable when they find themselves in a new jurisdiction. So we want to ensure that jurisdictions across the province have the supports necessary to attract new Ontarians to their communities.

I think it's a very important debate to have. It's very important that we, at this time—about a couple of weeks out from the federal budget—take a position and take a stand, and we let the federal government know that we have enjoyed the partnerships that we've worked on together, that they have benefited the province. But we want to continue to bring them to the table with us to

make the investments that are needed because we need all levels of government resolving to do what it takes to invest in the future success of our families. We need to know that they will be there and that they recognize the urgency of the situation, and that in the midst of the economic storm we've just come through, we need to continue to make those investments to ensure that we are well positioned as a province and as a country to take advantage of all future economic opportunities that are available. That's why the McGuinty government will continue to look for opportunities to partner with the federal government and also continue to make our stand for fairness for Ontarians.

1430

I appreciate the opportunity today to speak to this important issue. As Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, it's incredibly important for me to work with the federal government and also to engage the federal government in discussions on areas that I think are of incredible importance to the province; I feel that's my main role. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of our concerns and points of view with members of the House today, and I look forward to hearing their perspectives as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to join the debate. On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I rise to oppose this latest parliamentary tactic of the McGuinty government.

Dalton McGuinty has stooped to a new low in trying to deflect public attention from the sorry record of his Liberal government. It's bad enough that the McGuinty Liberals have allowed public money to be diverted into the pockets of Liberal-friendly consulting firms with eHealth and other scandals; now they're trying to deflect the public's attention from this government's embarrassing lack of action.

We just need to look back to October 2008, when we had an emergency debate on the economy. We debated that motion for some eight days: October 8, 9, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22 and 23, some 15 hours and 40 minutes. In part, the government motion read that "just as Ontario families do when finances get tight at home, the Ontario government should make adjustments...." That was October 2008. They still haven't made any adjustments. They talked about their five-point economic plan. Somehow that has disappeared off the radar. We haven't voted on this yet. That was October 2008. That's what a joke that government resolution was, and this one is more of the same.

It's just a tactic, because they didn't really plan on being here. They really planned on being prorogued but then didn't have the courage to actually do it. So here we are, and we have the whole week to debate this government resolution every afternoon. Government is about taking responsibility and making decisions. This McGuinty government needs to take responsibility for their own actions instead of trying to shift the blame to another level of government.

I think I'll deal with one point from the last speech before I get on to some of my notes. The last speaker was talking about the Green Energy Act and all the new jobs

they're creating. They promised a million new jobs. I remind the Speaker that their promises don't always come true. We have had it with promising not to raise taxes and with other issues, but they promised a million new jobs. What has actually happened in the last year? Well, we've lost 177,000 jobs in the past 16 months.

I think the one sure thing about this government's energy policy is that the price of energy is going up; I think you can count on that pretty clearly. What's that going to do? It's going to scare a lot of jobs away from this province and make it less affordable for seniors and others to stay in their homes.

We have a big, new mining development happening in northwestern Ontario, and what do you read about? They might be doing the smelting operations for this huge, new mining site in Manitoba because the energy prices are more reasonable. Don't you think other businesses are going to be thinking the same thing as McGuinty drives the cost of energy up to new heights in this province? Businesses make rational decisions, and if they see that we're the most expensive jurisdiction in the country, they probably aren't locating here.

Going back to my notes, let's consider this government's record on the economy. Dalton McGuinty has created a \$25-billion deficit. That means that each and every hour of the day, the Liberals are spending \$2.8 million more than they collect in revenue. While we were listening to the government blame Ottawa for their problems, Ontario's families saw more than \$2 million tacked on to the Ontario debt. In fact, it's been 123 days since they confessed they would run a \$25-billion deficit. Dalton McGuinty said he needed time to think before he would come up with a plan. His lack of action in that 123 days added \$8 billion more to the provincial debt.

Now, 123 days later, Dalton McGuinty emerges from his thinking place, and this is the best he can come up with: a non-binding resolution that goes to Ottawa, with hand held out, asking the federal government to dole out more welfare to a proud province that was once the economic engine of Confederation.

This is not a plan. It's a lot of things, but it's not a plan. It's an admission of failure by the McGuinty Liberals. It's a silly wedge resolution to divert attention from the awful job they're doing running the economy of this province. It's a feeble attempt to divert public attention from Dalton McGuinty's own failings. It's "wag the dog."

The Liberal caucus must be embarrassed to be standing up here, taking part in the Premier's silly antics. I'm sure I speak for them and others in this chamber when I say that I find this whole spectacle to be a joke. It is bad enough that Dalton McGuinty is wasting so much of the taxpayers' money with nothing to show for it; now he's also wasting the precious time that this Legislature has to deal with serious issues.

Instead of wasting this week on a non-binding resolution, we could and should be dealing with job losses, the increasing tax burden and Dalton McGuinty's out-of-control spending, the huge burden of red tape that has

been created in this province. But instead, we're wasting time on this stunt.

Why has Dalton McGuinty asked the Liberal caucus to go along with this stunt? What will it accomplish? He's doing it because he doesn't have a record his caucus can defend. He doesn't have a plan for the future. He doesn't even have a legislative plan for the rest of this week, and he lacks the courage to prorogue. So picking a false fight with Ottawa is his last hope to deflect public attention away from making Canada's worst government look like it actually stands for something.

This resolution will not do anything to address the hundreds of thousands of manufacturing job losses Dalton McGuinty has presided over. This resolution will do nothing to control the reckless spending that has the Liberals on course to double Ontario's debt—that's right, double Ontario's debt. When the McGuinty government came into power, the debt was \$140 billion; it's on track to be \$290 billion by 2012.

The McGuinty government is mortgaging our future. They're creating taxes for the future for our young people, and that is something that came out loud and clear recently in the pre-budget consultations.

This resolution fails to mention or address the impact of the massive new job-killing tax grab that is coming our way on July 1. This resolution fails to address the worries of Ontario's businesses being frozen out of this government's preferential subsidies to foreign companies like Samsung and Ubisoft. We heard that at the pre-budget consultations from the government's own expert witness, Dr. Warren Jestin from Scotiabank was there, and what did he say? What was his advice to the government? Don't pick winners and losers. Well, that's exactly what they're doing. They're picking winners and losers, and they're creating an extremely high-cost energy structure for this province.

In short, this resolution passes the buck for more than six years of failure. It is an attempt to wag the dog. It is an attempt to blame Canada. Blaming the federal government for your problems has been a pastime in other provinces, but never here—not before Dalton McGuinty.

Ontario families understand that the federal government has to come up with an action plan that helps the whole country recover. They understand that the federal government has managed recovery successfully in most jurisdictions across the whole country. They understand that most of the provinces have taken an inward look at how they spend tax dollars, and they've found new ways to improve their own economy. The McGuinty Liberals, however, followed the admission that they had a huge spending problem by going out and spending some more.

Ontario families who are struggling with their mortgages, who have tapped out their credit cards, don't go out and buy new cars. They don't understand Dalton McGuinty or why he hasn't adjusted his spending. Spending has increased some 65% since 2003, when Dalton McGuinty took power, despite what he said in the October 2008 emergency debate. They don't understand why, after making self-serving announcements and using

taxpayer money for partisan ads to get all the credit, the McGuinty Liberals are asking Ottawa to pick up the tab. Ontario families are proud Canadians—too proud for this kind of stunt.

1440

People used to resent Ontario because we were too wealthy; we were too powerful; we were too successful. We were calling the shots. Who would have predicted that the day would come when it would be the Premier of Ontario's time to whine, when Ontario would actually end up being a have-not province begging for crumbs from other provinces?

The Ontario PC caucus sees this resolution for what it is. We see Dalton McGuinty trying to deflect attention and blame Ottawa. We see Dalton McGuinty forcing his backbenchers to criticize the federal government rather than participate in real solutions here at Queen's Park. We see it for the embarrassing shame it is, and that is why the Ontario PC caucus will be voting against this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: It has been eight years that I've been here in this House listening to all manner of debate, and I really don't understand this debate at all. I don't know where it's going. I don't know why the government has come up with it—other than as, possibly, a time filler.

I agree with my colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka: We're waiting for the prorogation. There's nothing to do, so we're going to debate another government, we're going to debate a wish list that we want from another government, we're going to cast aspersions on another government, and we're going to pretend we're friends with another government. There are a whole bunch of things going on here, and I really wonder why we are wasting the time of this Legislature on what I consider to be such a frivolous motion.

Quite honestly, when I read this, I started to chortle; I started to laugh. I started to wonder, "What is this government doing and why are they doing it?" There are five major planks, and some of them are more silly than the one before. The first one is that they're going to ask the federal government for a renewal of health care, "a real rate of health care expenditure." They're going to ask that the federal government continue to give additional monies at the real rate of health care expenditure increase. I would think that that's not an unreasonable thing if the Ontario government had any intention of doing that itself. We know that they do not.

Members of this Legislature who sit on the finance committee had the pleasure of going across this province in eight locations over a similar number of days—although we did get snowed out of Dryden. We listened to 175 deputations. We got another 50 or so deputations from people who could not fit into the time frame because we were oversubscribed.

A great many of those we had to listen to, a great many people who came forward, were hospital adminis-

trators, people who sat on boards, doctors, people who were members of the LHINs, and they all talked to us about this government's plan. They all talked about the constraints that were being put upon them. Every single one of them confirmed that they had been told by members of the government, by the finance ministry, by the Ministry of Health, to expect either a 0%, a 1% or a 2% increase and that they should budget for each of those eventualities: 0%, 1% or 2%. Every single one of the LHINs, the doctors, the hospital boards and anyone who knew anything about it at all said that it was going to cost 3.5% to 4% for status quo, and every one of them told us that even in the best-case scenario, a budgeted 2% was going to mean cuts. It was going to mean services being taken away in respective municipalities.

Some of the hospitals came forward and told us what they would have to cut and what they expected would have to happen. Some of them talked about reduced nursing positions; some of them talked about programs that weren't going to be made available anymore.

In my own riding, we have a wonderful hospital with a CEO of whom we are proud, and I think the Minister of Health is probably proud as well. Although I've not heard her talk about Mr. Devitt, he's quite a good hospital administrator. When other hospitals find themselves in difficulty, as one in Scarborough found itself in, the province of Ontario, through the then Minister of Health, sent Mr. Devitt out to try to get their house in order, because he seems to know quite a bit about what he's doing.

I was very pleased to see, when the list of how much money people who are CEOs across Ontario and who are in the hospital business make, Mr. Devitt was towards the bottom. When I had a meeting with him, I asked him this question: "How is it you only make half as much as the CEOs of some of the hospitals who are not nearly so efficient?" And he told me, quite frankly, he thought he earned enough money and that when his contract is renewed each year and the board of directors of the hospital want to give him an increase, he eschews it. He says no. He said he makes enough money and he's happy with the amount that he makes. But I digress a little there.

He told me that, as well, they are having to make real choices at Toronto East General Hospital. The real choices they are making are not what they want to make, not what they would make, but he is budgeting at this point for a zero increase. He doesn't believe that there may be 1% or 2%; he thinks it's going to be zero.

One of the actions that Toronto East General Hospital has taken is to announce the closure of its physiotherapy unit on April 1, the beginning of the new budget year: a program that has been in effect in Toronto East General Hospital for a generation, a program that is used primarily by people who don't have insurance, who are poorer, and who came to the hospital in the first place usually for an operation or for something that requires them to have physiotherapy. He told me that in a perfect world, if he thought he was going to be getting an increase, he would keep that unit open, but in the reality of getting zero or

even 1% or 2%, its days are numbered and it's going to be closed. And that is exactly what is happening.

So I wonder how this government has the temerity to stand here and, in a motion, ask the federal government to subsidize Ontario at a real rate of health care expenditure when they have no intention of doing that themselves, when they are not committing to 3.5% or 4%, when they are committing to 0%, 1% or 2%. I don't know how I can vote for that. I don't know how any person in the Liberal government can vote to ask a federal government to do something more than what they are willing to do themselves.

That turns me to the second one. I read it and I shook my head. I often wonder about the gall of this government and the spokespeople in the government for proposing it. They are asking that the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement be honoured. That would be a good thing, to honour it, I'm sure. I'm sure the federal government has attempted to honour it in whatever way it could in the past. But the Ontario government has been one of the weak sisters of Canada when it comes to immigration and immigration policy.

Section 92 of the British North America Act and section 93 of that same act set out what the jurisdictions are of the federal and provincial governments, who does what within Confederation. It has remained unchanged since 1867. There are certain avenues that are exclusive to the federal government, there are certain ones that are exclusive to the provinces, and then there are two that are shared. One of them is agriculture, and that's why we have an agriculture minister in Canada and an agriculture minister here in the province of Ontario. The second one is immigration, which is why we have a federal minister of immigration and a minister in Ontario responsible for immigration as well.

Notwithstanding that, we do virtually nothing when it comes to the immigration process in Canada, virtually nothing, but we always have one thing that we do, and that is to ask the federal government for more and more and more money for our immigration program, which we will not fund ourselves. Virtually everything that is done immigration-wise in this province is done with federal dollars, virtually absolutely everything. The province of Ontario spends no money on immigration itself. It simply takes the transfer of federal dollars and spends it on federal programs or doesn't spend it on federal programs.

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I ask the members opposite, if you're going to ask the federal government to do a better job in terms of immigration, please be prepared to do it yourself. I have stood in this House now for some eight years, and I have asked successive governments, first the Conservative one and then, for the last six years, the Liberal one, why don't we do something that we are entitled to do under the British North America Act? Why don't we get seriously into the immigration business? Why don't we do what the province of Quebec did all those many years ago back in 1978? We have done absolutely nothing when it comes to helping people who choose to immigrate to this country

and particularly those who choose to immigrate to Ontario.

In 1978, Quebec came out with its own act, which they were entitled to do under the articles of Confederation. Within the four walls of that act, the Quebec government can select its own foreign nationals who seek to come to live permanently in Quebec and can choose its own immigrants. They have a grid system which they have developed in order to choose the immigrants who they believe will best make a contribution to the province of Quebec, who will be able to acculturate into the province of Quebec and who are needed by the province of Quebec, be they doctors or lawyers or nurses or nuclear scientists or business people. They choose their own immigrants.

We do not do that here in the province of Ontario. So all the time when Liberal members stand up here and say, "We're not getting immigrants. We're not getting the kind of immigrants, we're not getting immigrants with the right skills"—it's because we don't choose them. If you really want to do it right, then we should be choosing our own, just like Quebec does.

The second thing they do in the province of Quebec under the 1978 act is that they have the authority for temporary admissions. That is for people who are coming here as students, people who are coming here on work permits, people who are coming here for medical reasons. They help to choose their own. Because they do, they are much more spectacularly successful in recruiting foreign students who are going to legitimate and recognized schools.

They don't have a problem like we have here in Ontario with the fly-by-night schools. I just read about one this past week, a fly-by-night school that takes all the money off these poor foreign students who think they're coming here for a decent education. What do we do here? We set it up with the Ministry of Labour and we do some stuff and we talk about it, and we only act upon complaint, and we do nothing at all.

Or those who are here on work permits: What is to determine what people we need here for short duration? Quebec knows exactly what they need and how to act on it. We don't do any of that at all.

They have a program of integration that would make ours look like really small potatoes. If you are lucky enough to come to the province of Quebec, you are truly integrated into that society under the terms of the Quebec act. You are truly integrated, and there are monies set aside within that act for the integration of new immigrants. They offer financial assistance in the province of Quebec to lure the right people to come to their province who will help build their economy and make sure that their social structure and infrastructure continues to work.

They also have something which is remarkable. In this province, you can go out and you can hang a shingle on the door and say, "I'm an immigration consultant"—"I am a consultant, and I am going to rip you off of every dollar you ever earned. I'm going to offer you a service

that is absolutely worthless for tens of thousands of dollars”—and there is nothing that anybody can do about it. In Quebec, you can't do that because they have their own act, their own enforcement, and they also work hand in hand with the licensing authority. We license people in the province of Ontario, but we do a pretty poor job of enforcing who gets a licence, how they get it and whether or not they need a licence at all.

I'm saying all these things to say that here we have a government with the temerity to come forward and say, “We want more money for immigrants,” but a government that hasn't done anything that they have within the power of the legislation, within the power of the Constitution, to do, and that is to come out with our own act, to have our own selection criteria, our own temporary admissions criteria, our own integration of immigrants, our own financial assistance to those immigrants and our own inquiries, wrongdoings and enforcement activity against those who would rip off and cheat prospective immigrants. I think that that's what we need to be doing. If this government was asking for money from the federal government to do that, to set it up, or if this government was willing, even for a minute, to exercise what they can do to truly help new immigrants to this province of Ontario, instead of just mouthing the platitudes, I might be supportive.

The next thing we go on and see is the investments in post-secondary education. This is laughable. Ask for money from the federal government for education, which is a provincial responsibility under the British North America Act. I would gladly take some money from the federal government, but I don't know why they're going to give money to the province of Ontario. Why would they possibly give money to the province of Ontario? We have the dubious distinction, of all the 10 provinces in Canada, of having the highest post-secondary fees for people to go to college and university. We are number 10 when it comes to how much we expect from our students. When those students were here earlier, I wanted the minister to start talking about why Ontario has the highest fees of any place in Canada. I also wanted to ask her why we have the highest per capita ratios between professors and teachers and students. We have the dubious distinction in Ontario, under this government, of having probably the worst possible scenario for people who want to go on to higher education. We make them pay the highest fees and we give them the worst quality of education—not in terms of the professors who work hard or the schools that try, but in terms of the ratio of students to professors, it is the worst, and we're number 10 in that too. So here we are, a government that's not doing its responsibility; a government that is happy for us to be in 10th place and asking the federal government to give us some more money. I think this too is laughable.

We have a woefully underfunded community college system as well. On the finance committee, as we travelled across Ontario, people came from literally every community college to tell us that the community colleges, even more so than the universities, are under-

funded and that they desperately need money if they are to provide the kind of education that this province needs in terms of future development and in terms of financial stability for the people of Ontario.

They also said something else, which this government has always failed to act on: Ontario stands alone in not recognizing education that people have, not only from foreign jurisdictions but even jurisdictions within Ontario. People came forward from the community college system, and indeed from some of the universities, to say that Ontario needs to set up a structure whereby we can look at what credentials a person has. Say, if they went to community college and they have two or three years of community college, they're expected to start over in a similar course in a university if they want to get a university degree. British Columbia, which has set the standard, and some of the other provinces, including Manitoba, now recognize that time spent at a community college is applicable in part, at least, towards a university degree. So that if you finish a two-year program in a community college and then discover that, really, what you would like to do is go on to university, you don't have to start at the beginning; you are awarded usually at least one full credit year into university, so that you would start in second-year university. That would save the province a lot of money. This province is determined not to do that, and then they have the temerity to go off and ask the federal government for more money when they're spending money and forcing students to spend money where it need not be spent.

The government has also gone on to talk about child care spots. Again, I don't know where this government gets the nerve to say what they're saying in this motion. They are asking the federal government for more money for child care. Now as you know, I am a great advocate for child care. I believe in child care. I believe that for all those subsidized units that are out there waiting, there should be a child in place, and parents should have every reasonable expectation that their children have the best possible start by attending child care.

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I believe that women who are not able to get into the workforce would be able to if there was a subsidized child care rate similar to what they have in the province of Quebec, and if we had a system that recognized that working women, in particular, have an opportunity to avail themselves of that child care.

This government four years ago sat down with the federal Conservative government and accepted \$63.5 million a year for four years for a Best Start program. They knew that the program and the funding for the program were finite. They knew that it was going to last four years and four years only. They accepted the \$63.5 million over a four-year period rather than accepting the money in a lump sum, and they did so for a Best Start program. They negotiated that four-year agreement, and they signed on the dotted line. They signed knowing that it would end in four years. Now they're talking about wanting to have some more money from a government

that told them four years ago that there wouldn't be any at the end, notwithstanding what is happening in terms of the economy, notwithstanding that the federal government has a huge deficit of its own, but this program was intended only to be a four-year program.

Within that four years you'd think that this government could have done something. You'd think they could have spent a couple of dollars of their own money on daycare. But they didn't. What they did is they took the \$63.5 million and they doled it out, pretending all the while and making laudatory speeches here in the Legislature about the wonderful job that the Liberal government is doing around daycare. Well, it was pretty easy: You spent somebody else's money. That's all you did for four years. You didn't put up any provincial dollars. You didn't open up any daycare spaces with your own money. You spent federal money that you knew was finite and was going to cease on April 1 of this year.

Now the chickens have come home to roost. You took the credit. Now I guess you're going to have to take the blame, and the blame is coming pretty fast and pretty furious. Child care centres are starting to close. They have empty spaces. They have declining revenue. They are looking with fear and trepidation at April 1, knowing full well that many of them are going to go out of business.

Last year, the government came across with \$18 million in bridge financing. Is that going to happen again? Because if that's all the plan this government has, to plug the holes with \$18 million worth of financing, that is not much of a daycare policy.

We've already seen the fallout. We've seen what happened in Windsor. The city council of Windsor has shut down all of its eight places. They have put 118 child care workers out of work. They have closed down hundreds of spaces and subsidies. They have sent them off to either private or not-for-profit agencies and told the parents they were going to have to get used to it. They have said the municipality can no longer afford to do it because of the fact that there is going to be no money flowing through from the federal government.

We've also seen what has happened in the city of Toronto. There have been a couple of recent articles I would like to quote in the last few weeks about this. The first one comes from the Toronto Star, an article entitled "Subsidy Cuts Mean Fewer Daycare Spots," February 8, 2010, by Laurie Monsebraaten. She quotes Beaches-East York Councillor Janet Davis, who is my councillor where I live. She is a good councillor and a child care advocate. She says, "'What we are facing in child care is the perfect storm,' said Beaches-East York Councillor Janet Davis, chair of the city's community development and recreation committee.

"If the province doesn't step up in the budget, all the gains we made in the last decade will be lost," she said. "We'll be back to where we were in 1995."

This article also quotes one of my colleagues here in the House from York South-Weston, and I quote again from the article: "Liberal MPP Laura Albanese's York

South-Weston riding (which includes ... wards 11 and 12) faces the biggest subsidy loss in Toronto with 573 spaces in peril.

"New provincial fee subsidies for children up to age four will help municipalities adjust to all-day kindergarten, she said, but the details are still being worked out.

"However, with a \$24.7-billion provincial deficit, Ontario can't afford to replace the federal money, set to expire April 1, she said.

"I know (children and youth minister Laurel Broten) is talking to the federal government and we're calling for them to step up," she said."

So here it is: A provincial MPP on the government side says that there's no money in the budget and they're hoping that the federal government will come across with the money. She also knows full well that she is going to lose 573 subsidized spots in her riding alone, the most in all of the city of Toronto.

The article goes on to state, "The federal money is part of \$252 million in child care funds Ontario received from Ottawa in 2006 when the Harper government cancelled a previous \$5-billion national child care plan. Instead of spending all the money that year, Ontario spread it over four years to support about 7,600 new child care subsidies. The last \$63.5 million instalment runs out April 1."

Other articles on the same thing: From CBC News, "7,600 Daycare Spaces on the Line: Ontario Child Care Advocate." This is dated February 4. "The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care says 7,600 spaces for low-income families could disappear across the province this June, along with 1,800 child care jobs."

Parentcentral is a website, but I'm also quoting again from the Toronto Star. Laurie Monsebraaten, social justice reporter, has some good quotes as well: "Parents won't be the only ones to suffer, warns the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

"More than 3,000 child care sector jobs would be lost, causing a ripple effect that would suck more than \$148 million out of Ontario's economy...."

It concludes with the last couple of paragraphs, which say:

"The \$148-million calculation is conservative because it doesn't include the economic impact of an estimated 3,480 parents who would lose their jobs because they would have no other childcare options, says the analysis by the Centre for Spatial Economics. Nor does it include the cost of parents who may be forced to rely on welfare.

"The federal money is part of \$252 million in child care funds Ontario received in 2006 before Prime Minister Stephen Harper cancelled a \$5-billion child care plan."

There we have it. The government of Ontario has spent the last four years spending federal money that they knew was finite. They spent the last four years not spending any of their own monies for child care spaces, and in the end, when it all comes home to roost, when the federal money runs out, the only plan they have is to

stand there and ask for more, which, in my humble opinion, is as unlikely as can possibly happen.

We have something which is not in here, and I had to try to think about what was being proposed. Here we have a provincial government going cap in hand to the federal government like some character out of a Dickensian novel asking for more, gruel plate in hand. What is going to happen down there at the Good Roads and the small rural municipalities when they come with their gruel plate in hand, when they pass resolutions saying they want more from the Ontario government? This government and this Premier have already said to them that there will be no money available for municipalities this year, that some of the programs are not going to be there; that the subsidies that have been given in the past are not going to be there. They've said as much to the city of Toronto and they've said as much to every small, rural municipality in this province. They have said to some of them that they're going to cancel programs which literally will take them out of action. My colleague from Timmins—James Bay asked today about two municipalities—Smooth Rock Falls and I believe the other one was Opasatika—asking about what they're going to do. They said they're just going to hand the provincial government the keys to the town.

1510

What are you going to do if they pass resolutions? Are you going to treat them the same way the federal government is going to treat this one? Because that's exactly what's going to happen. It does no good to go to a senior or a higher level of government and ask them for money you know they don't have. And if you want to keep all of these things going—if you want to keep the schools going, if you want to keep the immigrant services going, if you want to keep the child care spaces open, if you want to keep the municipalities operating, if you want to keep all of that stuff operating—then we're going to have to do it ourselves.

That's what the motion should be today. That's what the budget should be in Ontario in another few weeks or a month or whenever it is: How do we go it ourselves? How do we make it happen? How do we get a government that is active, that makes those changes that are necessary and finds the revenues to do it without going cap in hand to the vagaries of the federal system—without having the municipal governments at the same time seeing that they have to do what they need to do and not always going cap in hand to the province. We need to make sure that's what we are doing.

This is a useless motion. I don't even know how the government had the nerve to put it forward. I don't know what they expect is going to happen with it. The only thing that I can think of—there are only two possibilities. The federal government says yes to some funds and everybody on the government side dances and says, "Look at this. We've delivered. We can do this. Hooray for the money." Or, in the more likely alternative, the federal government says, "No, there isn't any," and this government, when it comes time for the budget towards

the end of March, can stand up and say, "We had great plans, but the federal government won't give us any money. We would have done all these wonderful things if we had the money, but we don't, so now they're all being cut." I think that's the scenario that this is setting up, the scenario that this motion is going to fail to turn any heads in Ottawa.

This motion is not going to bring the billions of dollars that Ontario needs, and then this government, this finance minister, this Premier are going to stand in this House towards the end of March or the beginning of April and say, "In the absence of federal dollars, these are the cuts that we're going to make."

I don't want to be part of that. I don't want to be part of that process. I want this government to stand on its record and to stand on what it is going to do on budget day. Tell me what we're going to do. Tell me how we are going to do it. Tell me how we're going to raise the revenues. Tell me how we're going to do it without going cap in hand. That's what we want to hear. I don't want to be any part of this process of going like some Dickensian character to Ottawa and asking for more. That's not the way to run a government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank my colleague, Minister Smith, for bringing forward this motion—a motion about partnership for prosperity. As the federal government prepares its next budget, I agree that it's critically important that Ontario makes its priorities clear. So I'm pleased to talk today about our future: that of our government, our province and our country.

The fact is, the road ahead looks very different than was previously anticipated. Last year we were facing a devastating global economic downturn and we did everything we could to protect our economy, our jobs and our hard-working families. We worked in close partnership with the federal government to deliver record levels of infrastructure stimulus investments and provided support for Ontario's transition in the manufacturing sector. We also worked in partnership to help improve Ontario's competitiveness, in large part through the introduction of the harmonized sales tax. This strong partnership has helped us as a province minimize real threats and has averted some bleak projections.

This was a big achievement and it demonstrates just how effective our two governments can be when we work together for Ontarians and Canadians. But, indeed, there is more to do. We cannot be merely content with the past accomplishments. Today we face a new challenge. Our government, like others across the country and around the world, is facing a substantial long-term deficit. The deficit presents us with a significant challenge. There's no doubt that we're going to have to make some tough choices. Even so, this is no time to cut back on the scope of our ambitions. Instead, this is the time to come up with new initiatives and modern solutions that will enable Ontario and our great country to emerge even stronger.

Ontario's plan is to do just that. As referenced by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, in the past year alone we have launched three big initiatives that will deliver results in the short term and over the long term:

(1) We're working in partnership with the federal government to enable a harmonized sales tax that will increase our competitiveness by providing businesses with incentives to invest and create jobs. Despite what you may have heard, there is broad consensus across Ontario on this point. Municipalities, for example, will benefit. Peel region estimates that the HST will save over \$330,000 for the Peel Regional Police alone. The independent truckers association is also in favour, because they recognize it will be a huge incentive to grow their important industry.

(2) We're putting Ontario ahead of other jurisdictions—our competitors—in advancing the emerging green economy. We're attracting new investment, new jobs and economic growth while protecting our health and environment. We're building our economy by improving our water and our air and by fighting and combating climate change. It also goes a long way to protect future generations. For example, in Clarkson, in Mississauga South, we've seen huge investments in the transition from traditional automotive manufacturing to emissions-free production of recycled batteries to support electric cars.

(3) We're implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. Experts agree that this will give our kids the strongest possible start in school and create an even better-educated workforce which, in turn, helps Ontario enhance its competitiveness and improves our next generation. All the while, we're doing what it takes to provide the highest-quality public service. Services like health care are critical to our families, especially when times are tough. As an example, since I first arrived in this place in October 2007, Trillium Health Centre, in the great riding of Mississauga South, has seen a new fracture clinic, an increase in base funding, more beds, greater support to reduce ER wait times and a brand new, more modern hospital wing.

At the same time, however, we recognize that these are challenging economic times. That's why it's so important that our colleagues in the federal government don't cut health care funding for Ontario. We fully acknowledge that we are going to have to make some tough choices to put fiscal matters in order. But we will not use the deficit as a reason to avoid making those tough decisions or launching new programs that are necessary for our future prosperity.

A strong Canada needs a strong Ontario. This great province is still our country's economic powerhouse. Despite these extraordinary challenges, Ontario remains the single biggest net contributor to the federation. Ontarians have stood proudly and have shouldered a heavy weight during these tough economic times. And yet, we recognize that many Ontarians are concerned, and they're concerned about where we're headed. Will the federal government consider cutting health care

funding to their communities? Will the federal government provide a concrete plan to create a real national child care program? They're worried that the federal government has come up short when it comes to progressive plans to deal with climate change. Our economy and our collective confidence depend on stronger signals that support investments and offer real returns, and the best way to do that is to show Ontarians and Canadians that we can work in partnership to build a stronger province and a stronger country.

The minister outlined for you some of the specific ways we can achieve this partnership, this sense of balance and fairness. First off, protecting public services: The federal government needs to ensure that the current and future transfer payments that support the services Ontarians rely on are protected, even as the federal deficit is addressed.

Secondly, strengthening health care: The federal government should commit to the renewal of long-term health care funding agreements before they expire and growing health transfers at the real rate of health expenditures.

Third, creating green jobs: The federal government can do so much more to help position Canada as a global leader on the environment, by supporting Ontario's leading green economy through such things as a cap-and-trade program and by investing in Ontario's green energy initiatives that support jobs and investment.

Fourth, supporting new Canadians: The federal government must live up to the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement by ending the current shortchanging of new Canadians who come to Ontario.

Fifth, skills training: The federal government needs to continue to partner with Ontarians by enhanced investment in post-secondary education and training programs that build worker skills and knowledge. This investment offers hope and ability.

Lastly, boosting child care: The federal government needs to step up and provide stability to the thousands of Ontario families who rely on child care. Federal funding must continue to fund those quality child care spaces for Ontario children.

This is all about recognizing that Canada's success depends upon a strong and competitive Ontario. All levels of government must resolve to do what it takes to invest in the future success of our families. But perhaps more than that, we're all in this together and we need to find a way to move forward together. Our governments have worked in partnership over the past years to deliver a host of tangible results for Ontario's economy, so we have every reason to believe that we can build on these gains and take the next giant leap forward. But Ontarians need to see the right signals from the federal government. Ontarians need the federal government to embrace the urgency of this situation, just as it did when we were in the midst of the economic storm last year. Times remain volatile.

The Ontario government welcomes the opportunity to continue partnerships with the federal government. We

will continue to stand for fairness for Ontarians. It's essential. We are still the largest net contributors, and we deserve our fair share.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? There being none, the government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 172. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the motion by Minister Smith be deferred until February 23." That's by the government whip.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Orders of the day.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I will move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): We need a minister to move adjournment of the House.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The Minister of Education moves adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I, therefore, order that the House be adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1525.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

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Tuesday 23 February 2010

Mardi 23 février 2010



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 23 February 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 23 février 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for personal thought and inner reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Mrs. Dombrowsky moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters / Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm delighted today to stand in the Legislative Assembly. This really is a very special day, in that we have the opportunity to bring forward and debate what I think is an extraordinary piece of legislation—legislation that we will become known for, leaving a very significant thumbprint in education, one that is positive for all learners, and definitely for our future.

Our government prides itself on being a champion of public education. We have made great strides in the last seven years. Graduation rates are up. Elementary students' reading, writing and math scores have increased by 13%. Students are increasingly engaged in their education, thanks to our innovative student success program and SpeakUp! campaigns. Parents now have more resources and avenues to get involved with their child's school. Schools are more welcoming environments, thanks to our safe schools and equity and inclusion education initiatives.

Our government has worked to rebuild positive relationships with the education sector and to create a learn-

ing environment where all educators and educational support staff are appreciated and valued. I can say that when I visit schools, I am regularly approached. It's very uninvited, but teachers and support staff come to me to express their sincere thanks and appreciation. They have the sense that their government does value them, the work they do, how important it is and that we're there to support them on a daily basis.

Recent amendments to the Education Act have made student achievement and well-being the central priority and purpose for school boards. We have seen positive results and significant improvement all across the province. By working together, by putting student achievement first, putting their well-being first, at the very core of everything we do, we are building the best possible publicly funded education system—one that inspires confidence in our communities and success in our students.

Every day, as parents, friends, caregivers and educators, we can see the transformational and positive influence that education has on the lives of our children, the lives of their families and the communities where they live.

Our publicly funded education system truly makes a difference in the lives of these children, and now our government is moving forward on a pivotal transformation of our public education system: the introduction of full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds.

I stand in the House today to support Bill 242, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010. If passed, this act would amend the Education Act to ensure that all four- and five-year-olds have access to an engaging and enriching full day of learning.

Bill 242 would give school boards the responsibility and the authority to implement full-day learning programs, staffed during the regular school day by teachers and early childhood educators.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just beg your indulgence: I did neglect at the beginning of my remarks to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the member from Oakville.

This innovative new program will build on the very strong kindergarten programs that already are in place in the province of Ontario. Before- and after-school programs would be led by early childhood educators. Following the program model, the before- and after-school programs would be optional, and parents would pay a reasonable fee to enrol their children in those programs.

This bill would give school boards the authority and responsibility to set, charge and collect fees in accordance with the regulations that will be set, attached to

this bill, for those before- and after-school programs. The fees would be expected to cover the operational costs of this before- and after-day initiative. Under regulatory powers contained in the bill, we would ensure that the fees are reasonable by requiring that boards set the fees annually and approve them through the regular budget process at a board meeting that would be open to the public.

Although the fees will be set at a “reasonable” amount, we do recognize that the cost of the before- and after-school program may still be prohibitive for some families, and that is why we would also make subsidies available. So within this legislation, if it is passed, we would provide authority for the government to enter into agreements with municipalities or other parties that may already be managing subsidies for children before they enter school. The government would be enabled to administer subsidies for eligible families whose children are enrolled in the before- and after-school program. The government intends to enable a seamless subsidy flow to families in need as their children move through the child care and education systems. We intend to work closely with the municipal sector to make that seamlessness a reality.

I’ve had the opportunity—just last evening, as a matter of fact, I was visiting with many rural municipal representatives, and I have to say that the feedback that I’ve been receiving to date from representatives in the municipal sector has been very positive. In fact, I think it’s fair to say that they’ve been eager to have, and look forward to, an opportunity to partner with us in this very important endeavour.

If passed, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act would recognize the new role of early childhood educators in elementary schools and the work that they do to nurture our young students.

0910

The legislation would enable school boards and the minister to offer early childhood educators access to professional development courses and exchange programs so they, like their teacher partners, can continue to update their skills and expand their horizons to better help the children that they work with every day.

In addition, the legislation, if passed, would require that teachers and early childhood educators work together to provide high-quality, effective, play-based education to support enhanced learning and cognitive emotional and social development for the children that they have every day. It would mean that teachers and early childhood educators would work together under the direction of the school principals. They would collaborate to plan and deliver the kindergarten program, to assess and observe students and their achievements, and to communicate with the families of the students.

If passed, this legislation would provide an essential framework for the full-day learning program. It would be a pivotal step forward in our quest to ensure that all children and all families have access to high-quality education. Together, teachers and early childhood educators

would be responsible for maintaining a healthy learning environment, fostering and encouraging social and emotional development. However, teachers would remain responsible for formal reporting and discipline within the classroom. I’ve had the opportunity to speak with teachers about this, and early childhood educators as well, and they very much appreciate that it is clear to them the responsibilities that teachers will have in the early learning classrooms.

If passed, Bill 242 would ensure that the entire full-day learning program and its staff are held to the same high quality and safety standards as any other component of the education system. I have had parents inquire about whether the same safety standards would apply, and of course that will be the case if this legislation is passed. One of our core reasons for creating full-day learning was to make sure that parents had a safe, reliable and affordable option for before- and after-school programs for their young children. I’m sure many of us know friends and family members who have even first-hand experience with the challenges that can exist to find affordable, reliable and safe options for the care of children prior to attending school.

Children are precious. I think they are our most important and our most precious resource as a people. They absolutely deserve to be cared for in safe, healthy and stimulating environments. By passing the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, the Legislature will be providing such an option. Best of all, we are providing parents and students with a seamless day: one location to spend their day, not worrying about picking up the children from caregivers, getting them to kindergarten, picking them up at kindergarten and getting them back to the caregiver. Parents can pick them up at the end of the day. This is a seamless day, where children will arrive at school with their parents in the morning and they will be there, they will be cared for, for the entire day, and then they will be picked up by parents at the end of the day.

I think this shows that this government recognizes that parents need an affordable program to support them in their very good efforts to provide what is best for their children. We also recognize that this need exists throughout the calendar year, not just on regular school days. That’s why this legislation that we are debating in the House now, if passed, would also permit school boards to offer some additional programs. It is enabling legislation. It will enable school boards, if they so choose—if they hear from their parent community that this is an important service that they need to have in place for their children, school boards will now have the ability to provide programs for those students beyond age four, for the six- to 12-year-olds.

This means that boards could offer programs on non-instructional days, such as professional development days, on school breaks and also throughout the summer, but again, it will be the decision of the local board.

We certainly have been hearing from families who say that they are absolutely excited about our four- and five-

year-old initiative, but we recognize that they are also eager to work with us and their local boards so that the needs of families who have children six to 12 years old can also be met.

Boards would not be required to offer these extra programs. Instead, we will ask boards to listen to their communities. Whenever possible, where boards have the resources and the capacity to do so and where parents have asked for this type of support, we are encouraging boards to meet these needs. Schools are hubs in our communities, and the board and school staff know their communities. They know their students and the parents that they work with and serve. As always, we ask them to partner with their communities to do what is in the best interests of their students, within their means.

People have been talking for over a generation about the importance of a systematic approach to early learning such as this program. We've got a number of studies. We've talked about how this is the ideal, how this is what we should be doing. In Ontario, however, it seemed for a time that what we'd hear back in terms of the initiatives that should be mounted was, "Well, it just isn't the right time." That is what we heard. I say that we cannot wait for the perfect time; we must act now if we want to make a difference in the lives of our youngest children—and we need to make a difference in their lives; we absolutely do. They are our future. We want them to be successful, and we know that with these early learning opportunities, their chances for success increase. How can we turn away from that? These children are our future, and the future well-being and prosperity of Ontario rests with them. So we need to move forward on this right away.

Our government committed to this project in 2007, and now here we are. We are the first jurisdiction in Canada to be implementing full-day learning with integrated before- and after-school programs for four- and five-year-olds. Nearly 600 schools across Ontario are getting ready for this unique, innovative program in September. Up to 35,000 children and their families are looking forward to the benefits that it will bring them, and I can say that when this initiative was announced, it was very warmly received. I know that all members of this House are getting lots of positive feedback. The people of Ontario have been waiting long enough. They appreciate why it is so important that we move forward and do this for our children right now.

We went about this in a methodical way. We are taking our time to do this because we want to get it right. We want this program to truly make a difference in the lives of Ontario's children and families. We are taking a measured approach to its implementation. There are a couple of points that I would make on that.

Because we are the first jurisdiction to move forward in this way, we don't have a blueprint. We're not able to observe how and what did take place in other jurisdictions; in fact, other jurisdictions are watching us. We know that what is key to our success is to work collaboratively with our school boards and with community partners, and that is what we have done in identifying the

almost 600 school sites. We worked very closely with boards. We asked them to look at their system and identify where they had space available to move forward on this. We also asked them to work collaboratively with their coterminous boards. We wanted to ensure that within communities there was equity.

We also asked them to work with child care providers in their communities to understand where and how it was best to locate these centres.

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Mr. Jeff Leal: A team approach.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: It is absolutely a team approach.

People have been talking for over a generation about the importance of a systemic approach to early learning such as this program. Again, that is why we are moving forward on this now. In November 2007, Premier McGuinty appointed Dr. Charles Pascal to recommend the best way forward to deliver full-day learning for our youngest children.

I know that many in this Legislature—perhaps not so many people in our communities—have had the opportunity to read Dr. Pascal's report *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. I would offer that for anyone who may have some questions about the thinking behind this initiative, I believe that Dr. Pascal's document does an excellent job explaining why it is so important that we make these types of investments for our earliest learners.

Dr. Pascal consulted with many parents and members of the education, child care and municipal sectors about how best to support children and their families. It's indicated in his report that he spoke with literally thousands of people. It is a very comprehensive effort that was undertaken. We truly appreciate that.

Dr. Pascal presented his report last June. Since then, we have been moving quickly to realize our vision for full-day early learning. That vision includes a teacher and an early childhood educator working together in every classroom to help our four- and five-year-olds learn and grow. It includes a before- and after-school program led by early childhood educators where children will continue to benefit from play-based learning activities and interaction with their peers. It provides a much-needed seamless, stimulating day for our youngest students.

According to Statistics Canada, both parents work in four out of five families in Canada today. That's very different from when I was growing up. This certainly is a huge contrast from even 30 years ago, when the majority of families had one employed parent and one stay-at-home parent. Also, I think we appreciate the single-family situation in Ontario, that the number of those families has increased as well. We have moved so far from the family model where one parent stays home and there is another parent working that we really do have to look at how we have structured our system to support our youngest learners.

We also know that too many transitions during the day for young people can be very disruptive. It can also be

very unsettling for parents with the uncertainty of wondering, if their regular caregiver is ill or unable to look after their child, what they are going to be able to do. It has an impact on our productivity as a people. With full-day early learning, our four- and five-year-olds will spend the day in one engaging, integrated program. That means that their parents will have peace of mind at work during the day, knowing that their child is being well cared for as they learn and develop with their peers.

This program will also help level the playing field economically for young families. Affordable, high-quality early learning and care is, in many instances, very difficult for young families to access. The before- and after-school portion of the early learning program will offer these families a better choice. During the regular school day and during the before- and after-school programs, children will be engaged to explore the world around them through play-based activities. Early learning will help children learn to read, write, engage with their classmates and develop the other social, emotional and academic skills necessary for success. By giving them those opportunities at a young age, we are giving them a boost that will carry them the rest of their elementary school careers, and that will ready them to continue learning and exploring their world as they grow.

Our children will be better prepared for the full-day school experience in grade 1. They will be used to the routine. They'll have established friends at the school and familiarity with educators and the school environment, and they'll have a strong foundation to continue developing essential academic and life skills. If children start off grade 1 on a strong footing, they'll be more likely to succeed there and in the future.

In his report, Dr. Pascal noted that, "A major source of the human capital benefits comes from the link between children's participation in quality early years programs" and what they are able to attain in the future. He cites a Rutgers University study which found that "prolonged and regular full-day preschool attendance significantly increased children's verbal and mathematics test scores in grade 1 and beyond."

I heard members of the opposition argue that this program costs too much, that it's too expensive. I would counter that that is very short-sighted. I ask them to consider: What is the price of ensuring that our youngest learners have the good start that will enable them to be more successful when they arrive in school?

Experts, educators and leaders in Ontario and around the world agree with this investment. They agree that this is the best way to ensure the well-being and the success of the students who come to us in our school system.

President Obama has even recognized the significance of education and the role that it will continue to play, perhaps an even greater role. President Obama has said that the jurisdiction that will out-compete them in the new economy is the jurisdiction that out-educates them. There are people from around the world looking at what we're doing with this initiative.

The Premier and members of this government and countless parents, teachers and early childhood educators

recognize that if we want to out-educate the world, we need to start from the very beginning. We need to give our children the most solid foundation, the most opportunities, the very best start we possibly can.

When children get a strong start in elementary school, they are more likely to do well in high school, and they are more likely to go on and graduate and enjoy an enriching post-secondary experience, whether they learn a trade, whether they go to a community college or whether they attend university. They are more likely to pursue all of those avenues if they have had a successful experience, particularly in their earliest learning years.

A study by James Heckman, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, looked at the impact of social programs on the economy and on society at large. Professor Heckman calculated a 7-to-1 return on public investment for young children. That is compared to a 1-to-1 payback with regard to the investment in adults. Clearly, by focusing on investments in our youngest learners, that is where we get the biggest bang for our buck, so to speak.

Instead of thinking about the money that we're spending on early learning, I think that it's absolutely essential that we think about the money that we are saving by building a stronger education system, a stronger workforce and a stronger future.

It is clear that the benefits of investing in early learning go far beyond individual parents and children. These investments boost local economies, help Ontario compete globally and strengthen our social fabric.

Two recent major reviews of very different topics cited investment in early childhood as a vital driver of economic and social progress. I'll just take a minute to identify Ontario in the Creative Age. This is a document that was co-authored by Roger Martin and Richard Florida, and in that document they advise, "Make early childhood development a high priority. This is the highest-payoff investment that we can make in our long-run prosperity." This is the advice that very respected economists have provided to us.

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In addition to that, we have the Roots of Youth Violence report, which was co-authored by Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling. In that document it was noted, "Given the relationship between undiagnosed literacy problems and behavioural problems later in life, including incarceration in many cases, effective early learning programs can play an enormous identification and prevention role"—yet another good reason that demonstrates the good sense of this investment.

Early learning for four- and five-year-olds is a significant investment. What are we spending it on? The bottom line is not the price tag. We are making this investment in our human resources, the most precious resources we have as a province. It is the children who are going to have more opportunities to succeed because of the benefits that early learning will give them. It is for the families who are going to have more opportunities to succeed because of the benefits that early learning will give them

with the before- and after-school programs in the full-day learning program. At the end of the day, when we have fully implemented this program across the province, that's going to be for all four- and five-year-olds and their families. That is good for all Ontario.

In his recent article in the *Walrus*, Roger Martin says that investing in education is an investment in the "future prosperity" of our people, our province and our economy.

What we are talking about here today is our vision for the future. This is not just planning for impacts within a term of office. Quite the contrary, what we have here is a vision for our future: building for a strong, prosperous and successful economy for all of the people of Ontario.

Today's four- and five-year-olds will be tomorrow's leaders, workers and innovators. They will run our private businesses and our public institutions. They are our collective success plan, and our investment in them will pay off tenfold.

To get there, our children need our full support now. They need the care and support of a full, integrated day of learning with a teacher and an early childhood educator. They need a seamless day in one place, with familiar faces and engaging activities. We need to put the pieces in place to give them that.

Full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds is the next essential step in our quest to make Ontario's education system the best in the world. Bill 242, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, if passed, will allow teachers and early childhood educators to work side by side to help children learn, to help them play and grow during the regular school day. This will give children a seamless day in one location, with continuous staffing, familiar faces and friends, where they feel safe and encouraged to learn and play and explore.

This program is essential for giving our youngest students a brighter future, for giving our families the support they need and for building a stronger Ontario for all. I do urge all of my colleagues in this Legislature to please support this legislation for the children and the future of the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. Certainly it is an exciting topic we're talking about, Bill 242, the full-day early learning statute law amendment legislation that the House has before us today.

It's a pivotal piece of legislation, one that's going to provide the framework for our innovative full-day learning program. It's a new and integrated program that's going to require boards across the province of Ontario to provide programs that are innovative and to provide additional services in their elementary schools for the families of this province.

It's also an essential piece of the government's plan to build a stronger Ontario and give the citizens of Ontario a brighter future. Because when we open our doors to full-day learning for our four- and five-year-old young citizens, it's not simply a matter of improving educational

opportunities for our kids and giving them more chances at success; it's going to be about ensuring that our children have every opportunity they need to prepare them for the more advanced learning that takes place when they enter grade 1, later in school, obviously, and even after they move on to graduation.

Full-day early learning is going to provide a foundation for the success of our youngest students. It's going to be a valuable support network for their families as well. It's going to provide parents in Ontario with an option that provides peace of mind—and we know how important that is as a parent. Not only that, it's going to provide that peace of mind at a very, very reasonable rate.

Many families today, we know, are caught up in the struggle to juggle the responsibilities that come with holding a full- or part-time job, being parents and having family responsibilities at the same time. With full-day learning, parents are going to know that their children are spending the day in an environment that's safe, welcoming, educational and nurturing. They will know that their child is learning and playing and growing up with their peers. That peace of mind helps make life a little easier for the parents as well.

The program is also about building a strong economy. It's going to give children a boost that will carry through during the rest of their elementary school and it's going to set them up to continue learning and exploring their world as they grow into older young people.

We know that this kind of program gives our kids a better chance of not only completing high school, but then, after that, going on to university, to college, to an apprenticeship program or skills training, to landing a good job and enjoying the quality of life that we all seek in this province. Full-day learning is going to set them on the road to becoming the innovative and creative young workers that this province sorely needs. It's a key part of our government's plan to create that strong workforce and a knowledge-based economy, one that can compete—and not just compete, but can excel—at the global level. As the minister has just said, it's an investment that we know is going to pay off dividends in the long run for both our people and our economy.

So our government today is committing to getting full-day learning into every elementary school across this province. We're committed to working with the school boards, principals, teachers, early childhood educators, the child care sector and the municipal sector to make sure that this program is successful. That's why we have introduced the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010.

If this bill before us is passed, Bill 242 is going to ensure that when a full-day learning program is fully implemented, all four- and five-year olds will have access to high-quality enriching days of both learning and play. It's going to give the boards across Ontario the authority and the responsibility to deliver these innovative programs. It's going to provide the framework that's needed for all of the key players to work together to implement full-day learning across the province.

We know that it's imperative that this be done quickly to give more children more opportunities sooner, but we're also aware that we're doing so during a recession—that we're rolling out a large program that is unprecedented in terms of its scale and its scope. So we're taking our time to make sure that we get this right. Nearly 600 schools will be offering full-day learning in September of this year, if this bill is passed. That number will grow over the next few years, and our goal is to have the program fully implemented in all Ontario schools by 2015-16.

In October 2009, the Minister of Education asked school boards to recommend which schools they would pick that could be ready to offer full-day learning in September 2010. We asked them specifically to look at whether a school had space available, space that would be appropriate for four- and five-year-olds. We asked them to also look at the immediate need for such a program in the community. More than one half of the schools that will offer this program in September are in areas where local boards have identified there are very high needs. We also asked those same boards to consider the impact that a full-day-learning class would have on existing child care in the geographic areas.

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We asked local school boards to work together. We asked representatives from the public, the Catholic, the French and the English boards to co-operate to ensure that full-day learning was spread out across all the communities in Ontario. They did. They came back to us. They made very strong recommendations to the ministry about which schools could bring full-day learning to their communities this fall.

The nearly 600 schools that were selected will serve as leaders in future years, schools we can learn from about the rollout of this program, much as Ontario will now be a leader for other jurisdictions that are also looking to revamp their own systems and improve their early childhood education systems. Other jurisdictions around the world and on this continent are looking for ways to do their best for their youngest students. Those jurisdictions now are going to be looking at what happens in Ontario, as an example of how it can be achieved.

I'm personally excited that some of my local elementary schools, those in Oakville, will be among those leaders. I've had the opportunity to visit some, and I know personally how much the schools are looking forward to this new program. I know that the children, their parents and the community overall will benefit greatly from full-day learning.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit St. Luke's school in the Clearview area of Oakville. I was able to introduce the program to those who are going to benefit from it most, and that is the parents themselves. I went into the JK class and the SK class, and I asked the students what they themselves thought about the introduction of full-day learning. When I told them they were going to have to stay at school all day, there were some groans. When I told them they were going to be able to

spend the day with their friends and they were going to be able to learn new things, they were very excited.

I talked to the grade 5s, as we all do when we talk to the civics classes. I asked them what they thought about Ontario and them as students having to compete with the rest of the world, having to become smarter than the rest of the world, having to become more educated than the rest of the world in order to get the jobs and the lifestyle that they want when they graduate and they move on to raise families themselves. Without any hesitation, the grade 5s in the civics class at St. Luke's, when I announced it to them—we did it in the form of a formal media release, and they participated and pretended they were members of the journalist industry—agreed at the end of the day that this is one of the best things that we could do for their younger brothers and sisters. So I take some comfort that not only are the experts saying that this is something we should move ahead on, this is something that the young people of the province realize is going to pay off in great benefits for them as well.

Some of the provinces currently offer elements of a full-day learning program for young children, but no other jurisdiction offers a full-day kindergarten program in the comprehensive and integrated way that an extended day program for four- and five-year-olds will accomplish. That's not because this model is any sort of outrageous idea. On the contrary, it's an idea whose time has come.

In 2001, a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said that governments were increasingly beginning to recognize that equitable access to quality early childhood education can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of families. And yet, regrettably, almost a decade later, integrated learning is still a relatively new concept in Canada and in all of North America. That's going to change if this legislation is passed.

It's exciting and it's challenging to be the first to do something that's this monumental. We're forging a path on this continent for early learning. We know that others eventually will be journeying down that same path, adopting and adapting our program for their own children and their own jurisdictions.

Other provinces, other territories and even other countries have already long looked to Ontario as a model for a strong educational system. Our government is confident that early learning will be seen as one of the strongest aspects of our education system, one that's going to be worth studying and one that's going to be worth emulating.

We're not starting from scratch, however, with this model. Already in Ontario we've seen some great, but different, examples of full-day learning for young students. For example, if we look at the French-language boards across Ontario, they've been offering full-day programs for the past decade, and they've seen, already, very clear improvements in their students' achievements as a result. Other boards, municipalities and even individ-

ual schools have worked hard to offer parents a better choice in terms of early childhood education and early care.

Dr. Pascal, whom we all know, spoke about some of these different models in his report that was entitled *With Our Best Future in Mind*. Our government staff then, in turn, looked to Dr. Pascal's report and to his recommendations as we developed our early learning model. Bill 242 would set in stone some of the best elements of a number of different models. If passed, it's going to create a seamless, integrated program for our youngest children in elementary schools right across the province of Ontario.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share with the Legislature some quotes from some of the partners that we engage in early education. Teachers and early child care advocates agree that giving four- and five-year-olds a stronger start on their learning path will be good for them. If it's good for them, it's good for Ontario.

Lois Mahon, president of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators, says, "We are pleased to see early childhood education move forward in Ontario with the combined strength of a team of both early childhood educators and teachers.... With registered early childhood educators in the classrooms, children will get the full benefit of education during these critical early years."

Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, says, "We commend the government for its commitment to the welfare of young children. The decision took a lot of courage in today's economic environment, but it will pay a lifetime of rewards, not only for children, but for our communities and for our economy."

Economists and education advocates agree that full-day learning is a wise and much-needed investment. Veronica Lacey, president and CEO, the Learning Partnership, and Don Drummond, chief economist, TD Bank Financial Group, say, "We must invest, once and for all, in our youngest children and their families in a coordinated, integrated way. For Ontarians to reap the highest return on our education dollars, to help us succeed economically and have a strong social fabric in the future, extraordinary efforts are required to support early learning. At a time of soaring deficits there are, understandably, concerns as to whether the initiative can be afforded. But given rates of return to investing in early childhood education, the more pertinent question is whether we can afford not to make such an investment."

The executive director of the parent advocacy group People for Education, Annie Kidder, says as follows: "In these tough times it's encouraging to see the government sticking to a strategy that will be as good for families and children as it is for Ontario's economic recovery. Early learning is one of the best stimulus investments a government can make to stem an economic downturn."

Everyday parents recognize the value of this program. It speaks for itself and its value to not only the families but to the children as well.

In Dr. Pascal's report on how to implement full-day learning in Ontario, a parent from North Bay said, "I am

not a wealthy person and I have always had too much work to do. But my children were able to have all-day learning a few years back. It gave my boys a big help to their abilities and confidence." The same parent said to Dr. Pascal, "Tell the Premier it is a good thing that everyone in Ontario can have this choice for their children too."

This parent is representative of so many parents in my own community of Oakville, I'm sure in your community, and of parents right throughout the province—parents who know and understand that full-day learning is going to make their lives easier, who know that full-day learning will have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the lives of their children.

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Dr. Pascal also notes in his report that more than one in four children enter grade 1 significantly behind their peers. Our schools work hard to help all children succeed, but it makes sense that if children get off to a rough start, it takes more effort from them, from their parents and from their teachers in the future to help them catch up. It makes much more sense to not let them fall behind in the first place. When a child gets that focused and targeted assistance during their first years in school, they're simply more likely to succeed in future years. Research has shown it's less difficult and less costly to intervene and address a child's needs during those early years than it is in the later years. Early learning is key to that future success.

The Canadian Council on Learning tells us, "Research indicates that the experiences during the first five years of a child's life have a major bearing on his or her future success in school, in the workplace and many other aspects of a healthy, fulfilling life." Children's life experiences, especially in the first five years, are so varied. By the time they start kindergarten, some children are already reading independently; others, though, are still learning the alphabet. This is not good for them, for their families, and it's not good for the province of Ontario. A full day of learning where children can interact with their classmates, playing in and exploring the world around them; a full day in one location, one safe, welcoming location with two trained professionals—that's going to help level the playing field for all the students in our province.

If we pass this bill, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, it's going to provide school board staff, principals, teachers and early childhood educators in this province with a clear framework regarding their responsibilities in the new program because, like any other program we introduce, the success of full-day early learning depends so much on the front-line staff of our educational system that dedicate themselves to the students and the children of our province on a daily basis. In this case, the teachers and early childhood educators who will be working together in the classroom during the school day are the ones who will truly make a difference to our young people.

In Ontario—we all know this House would agree—we have high-quality teachers who constantly excel at help-

ing young people learn. We have stellar early childhood educators who make a world of difference to young children and their families in the most crucial years of their development. These two professionals have different skill sets and different experiences to inform their work in a classroom. Ontario's young children will benefit most when they have access to both of those skill sets. They need the guidance and the instruction of certified teachers to get them ready for the further education that lies ahead of them, and they need the guidance and the support of early childhood educators, who are specially trained to develop and implement activities that promote a young person's intellectual, physical, social and emotional growth.

I know some people have raised concerns about how those teachers and early childhood educators will work together in the classroom, how they will have to adjust to having to share space and responsibilities in a professional way in the best interests of our students. I have no doubt, however, given the quality of the individuals involved and the professionalism that they bring to their job on a daily basis, that our teachers and early childhood educators are going to continue to work well together, because they'll be united behind that same common goal that I hope this whole House unites behind: helping our children reach their full potential.

The legislation we're discussing today would help provide a framework for that relationship. It's going to create a duty to co-operate. It's going to set out very clearly the expectation that the professionals who look after the educational interests of our young persons, that is, the teachers and the early childhood educators in this province, work together to give children the attention they need in those early years that is so important, that they bring their best to work every day and that when they're trying to work out the new aspects of this system on a daily basis, they have a duty to keep the interests of the four- and five-year-olds in this province in a paramount position. It's imperative that they co-operate to make sure that children in our province of Ontario receive the attention they need.

Under the regulatory and the guideline powers of the full-day learning program, there will be one teacher and one early childhood educator in each class of approximately 26 students. That means that during the regular school day, there's going to be a ratio of one adult for every 13 students. That ratio is going to stay the same for before- and after-school programs: one early childhood educator for every 13 children. If more than 13 children are enrolled in the before- or the after-school program, another adult will come into the classroom to support the early childhood educator as well.

Children are going to receive the attention that they need in the early years. The staffing is going to be dealt with in an appropriate way, and the professionals themselves who are dealing with our children will have the time to dedicate to the individual issues that arise. Obviously, in a class of 26 four- and five-year-olds, you're going to have a variety of concerns and issues that need

to be dealt with. We need to be confident that the professionals who are employed in that field have the time.

Often, there were examples in the past where we felt our teachers hadn't had the time to dedicate to the individual needs of students. This act will ensure that the time is set out, that the time is prescribed and that the time will be dedicated to the four- and five-year-olds to help them begin to achieve their full potential.

That means that throughout the day, students will get more one-on-one attention and more opportunities to learn together in small groups. That means that students will do better in school. It's that simple. They will be more likely to succeed in high school. If you succeed in high school, you're more likely to succeed in post-secondary education, skills-training or in apprenticeship programs.

Our full-day learning program is also a key element of this government's poverty reduction strategy, which I know all members of the House support. The strategy is a long-term plan that focuses first on giving children and their families the support that they need to reach their full individual potential.

It's the right thing to do for Ontarians. It's a smart thing to do for our economy, as well. Educated, healthy and employable people make up an educated, healthy and employable workforce. It's critical to Ontario's future that we have those individuals, that we become, as a society, those individuals.

They say that public education is the great equalizer. We say a strong, publicly funded education system, especially a strong early learning program, will have long-term economic benefits for individuals, for families and for the province. You can start off in this life as a wealthy young person or as a person from moderate means, but what people have found about the public education system in the province of Ontario is that it's a great equalizer. If you can get into a quality public education system, which every child in Ontario can, the sky is the limit. Nothing holds you back. It's not a matter of income anymore. It's a matter of what you bring to your school on a daily basis, and it's a matter of what we do as legislators to ensure that that quality education is provided.

University of Toronto economists show that a developmentally enriched child care program results in a 2-to-1 payback ratio, due to the increased taxes that are then paid in the future by working parents, and the reduced need for social service expenditures. Look at the province of Quebec: Over 40% of the cost of their program is covered by tax revenues from mothers who would simply not be working if low-cost child care options were not available.

The evidence is clear. I hope the House agrees with this evidence. We cannot wait any longer to make full-day learning a reality. It's the right policy for strengthening our education system, and it's the right policy for enhancing our future workforce. It makes Ontario a better place. It gives Ontario a better future. It makes other jurisdictions around the world look at Ontario and realize that Ontario is going down the right road in this regard

and perhaps they should be paying some attention to what we're doing for our young people here.

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I tell young people in schools, when I talk to the grade 5s, that as I was growing up, I was competing with kids on my street for jobs. When our young people today are growing up, they're competing with young people around the world for jobs, and they understand that, even in the early grades. They understand that what they're able to do educationally in the early part of their lives is going to determine what sort of future they have, what sort of families they're able to raise when they become parents themselves, what they're going to be able to pass on to their own children and grandchildren. They understand the importance of their educational system, and they're very proud of their schools. Four- and five-year-olds I talk to are very proud of their schools, and I think once they realize that this is being expanded, that we're paying even more attention to those students in the younger grades, they'll be even more proud.

It's the right policy, we know, because it's going to strengthen the education system we have right here in the province of Ontario, which is already topnotch. And the employers in the province of Ontario and those who are looking perhaps to invest in the province in the future will look to the education system and see one that is leading the way.

Full-day learning is the right thing to do to make a difference in the lives of our young students. It's going to make a positive change in the education system in the province. It's going to work toward a stronger, more vibrant future for ourselves, for people who are parents, for young people who are in the system and for those who have yet to enter the system, for children who are just being born today or who were just born this week. They will be the beneficiaries of this too as we phase this in.

So just as teachers and early childhood educators will work together during the day to help children learn and play and grow, this government is going to continue to work closely with school boards and the other community partners to implement high-quality programs for our children. If we work together, we can give our children the best possible start in school and we can just give them a stronger start in life. This is going to set our children on the road to success, it's going to help the economy of the future, it's going to help the education system of today, and it's going to help us grow more and more of the fantastic young people we see in this province who are perhaps exemplified by the young pages who are sitting at your feet. This is worthy of the support of the entire House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I arrived in this Legislature most of three years ago, and I would be the first to admit that I arrived here with a certain degree of cynicism. When I listen to the debate that I'm hearing today, as we start talking about this bill, it increases the cynicism that I came with.

On the face of it, all-day kindergarten, four-year-old children—great idea. I'm sincere. I would like to see it happen. I would echo all of the sentiments expressed by the minister and by the member from Oakville. It's a lovely idea but it's a bad time, and that would indicate what we in this Legislature all know to be true: that this is a government that lacks the ability to prioritize the actions that it wants to take.

I'd be a rich guy if I had a nickel for every single time that I heard the phrase "it's for the children" come out of people on the other side, as I heard the minister say this morning. A couple of weeks ago I was on a pre-budget hearing tour with that same member from Oakville who just spoke, and I can't believe that we heard the same submissions from place to place.

I will recall for him and for this Legislature one very particular one, and that was from a woman in Niagara Falls, a woman with a two-year-old little boy who was severely autistic. She was pleading for increased allocation to children's mental health. I said to her, "If you had the choice and you were the Minister of Finance and you could help your son or you could fund junior kindergarten for four-year-olds, what would you do?" She said, "That's easy, because I not only have this two-year-old autistic son, I have a four-year-old girl who qualifies for the program, and in a New York minute I would go for the children's mental health."

That's called prioritization. That's what this government fails to understand. So while this may be a good idea in principle, in practice, it just is the wrong time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Howard Hampton: In the two minutes that I have, I want to say this: This is a government that is renowned for offering up promises. Let me give you some examples.

We have heard from this government that they're promising retraining for workers, and we have heard it over and over again. But I know that in my part of Ontario, where literally tens of thousands of hard-working people have lost their jobs, what this government is actually doing is cutting retraining. You talk to any community retraining agency, and they will tell you that the opportunities for self-employment, the opportunities for retraining, are, in fact, being cut.

This is a government that has offered up a dream, a promise, that they're going to tackle poverty. But I can tell you, whether you're in Windsor or you're in London or St. Thomas or Niagara or Hamilton or Oshawa or Etobicoke-Rexdale or Scarborough or Peterborough or Sudbury or Timmins or Thunder Bay or Cornwall, more people are losing their jobs and falling into poverty every day.

This is a government that, not so long ago, made all kinds of pronouncements about children's mental health. A committee was struck, a special committee, to address that promise, but I can tell you that children's mental health services are disappearing just as cuts to children's

aid societies and children's mental health agencies are happening.

This government, again, is offering up another promise. But the reality out there is that child care spaces are disappearing. They're disappearing in Toronto. They're disappearing in Sudbury. A promise is one thing; reality is another.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to join in this morning and respond to the previous speakers who spoke to Bill 242.

I was pleased when the Premier came to Chatham to visit Victor Lauriston school and talk about the possibilities that existed within early learning. The board members were there. They were very keen on this—the principal of the school and the parents as well.

We did visit some of the young people who were at that school in JK and kindergarten, and it's amazing how much information these young people retained. One little chap was telling us about Macaroni penguins. As soon as we left the tour, the adults were on their BlackBerrys trying to find out if there was such a thing as Macaroni penguins and, indeed, there is. That young fellow will carry that knowledge on for days and months and years to come.

I know this to be true, and many of us would identify with this, because we have grandchildren. Our grandson Trent is only three. He's in a daycare situation, but he is learning so many things and recalling them, remembering them and bringing them into practice.

Here is an example of what young people can remember: We were talking about the current Olympic Games going on at the dinner table. He was seated there, being good, eating his meal. He's listening to us talking about the Olympics, and he immediately broke into singing O Canada. They had been taking the issue of Olympics in daycare. At the age of three, he immediately recognized our conversation and went into singing O Canada—admittedly a somewhat difficult song to learn, but he did very well.

He can't wait to learn and begin to read. He carries books around with him all the time. He must have a few hundred books, and he's just excited and elated to know that one day he is going to read, and that will be very soon.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened quite intently, having served as a school trustee in the past; my wife, a teacher and, in fact, an early childhood educator; and my daughter being a teacher.

I do believe in the sentiment that education is certainly, as Charles Pascal or Roger Martin or Richard Florida would say, an important contribution to the economy and the welfare of the province. We've established that the premise and the objective is acceptable. But when you closely examine the reality, you find out that even in the beginning sections of the preamble of the bill there are some problems.

The problems are here: First of all, it's not fair. It's being implemented over five years. That's two elections. Who's getting left out? Who's getting left behind and why?

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think this is an example—and the member over there said the Tories would be left out. I would hope that sort of attitude isn't prevailing in your caucus. It certainly may explain why you're not in cabinet.

The other thing is, the full-day learning requires—requires, and the word is in the bill—collaboration between the ECE as well as the teachers. Now, why is the word so demanding as “requiring” co-operation? Well, there are a lot of issues between the Day Nurseries Act and the Education Act.

More importantly, if you look at the promises and the deliverables, you can see here in this bill that they're actually going to be increasing class size. They promised in the last election to have classes of 20; now the classes are going to be 26. You can't have it both ways. I would think they should be first honest with the people. There's a \$25-billion deficit. They're spending \$2.8 million an hour more than they are receiving in revenue. That debt they're accumulating is going to our children. That's who will have to pay it off.

Many of the programs like special education aren't properly funded. Read the article by the Toronto District School Board today: They are short \$17 million, and they are closing schools—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Oakville has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I thought I was listening to Goldilocks there for a few minutes. It sounds like the official opposition says it's way too much, and the NDP says it's not nearly enough, so chances are it's just right.

But certainly there's an excitement out there amongst the profession. The schools have been identified. Those schools that will be offering full-day learning have been identified in my community. I know even Mr. Shurman, the member from Thornhill, with all his cynicism, has got to be excited that four- and five-year-olds in Thornhill will be able to go to school for full-day learning. Even through that thick skin he's developed, he knows that's a good thing for his students.

Applause.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: He's clapping, and that's the right thing for him to do.

It's self-evident that the investment that you make in early childhood education pays off in dividends in the future. There's an old-fashioned thought that maybe we shouldn't start school—there are some cultures that start school in grade 5, I think. Ontario's different. Ontario understands that investment in young people pays dividends for the individuals and pays dividends for the economy. That's why we are doing it.

It is a tough time to do it; the opposition is absolutely right. It's tough economic times out there. It would be

very easy for a government that didn't want to invest in its young people to walk away from this. In fact, there was a fear in the community for a while that because there was a recession, because there were global economic troubles, perhaps the government might not implement this. Well, this is a clear indication that this government has a commitment to full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds.

This initiative deserves the support of all members of the House. It simply is a good thing for our young people, it's a good thing for the economy, and it's a good thing for the province of Ontario and for the future of this province.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): As it is close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I would like to introduce today the parents of my page, Nevan. We have here today Pat and Brian Whiteside, as well as Nevan's uncle.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Ajax-Pickering and page Matthew Kostuch, we'd like to welcome his mother, Christine Kostuch; his father, Jim; and his sisters Jessica and Kristen, sitting in the west gallery today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, we are just weeks away from the end of the fiscal year and it is time to measure you against your promise to create 148,000 net new jobs by year end. Premier, again, you promised 148,000 new jobs but you lost 140,000. You fell well short of your goal and, in fact, went in the wrong direction altogether. Premier, are your job promises even worth the paper that they're printed on?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not exactly sure where my honourable colleague is getting his numbers. What I can say is that when Ontario, like the rest of the country and indeed most of the world, was affected by this global recession, we said that we needed to respond, and we did so in a way that consisted of a number of extraordinary measures. One of those was to invest over \$32 billion in infrastructure. We're talking about building schools, roads, hospitals and bridges and retrofitting schools as well, all with a view to creating jobs in the short term and enhancing our competitiveness in the long term. We know that this year alone, that'll create over 160,000 jobs. So I'm not exactly sure where the target my honour-

able colleague referenced has come from, but we are doing exactly what we need to do, given the times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the targets come from your very own budget. I guess that budget's not worth the paper it's printed on if you cannot remember your very own promises.

You promised 148,000 jobs this year and 162,000 next year. You promised 100,000 additional student jobs. In the rest of 2009, the Premier promised 50,000 so-called green energy jobs, 800 Ubisoft jobs, 16,000 Samsung jobs and somehow, 600,000 new jobs from your HST sales tax grab. Altogether, Dalton McGuinty has promised a grand total of one million new jobs in the last year alone, and in that time frame he has lost 140,000.

Premier, why should Ontario families believe your job promises if you cannot or will not deliver?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is having a lot of fun with numbers today. I think it's important to keep in mind what we did say, and I want to come back to our commitment to build new infrastructure in Ontario, in particular, that \$32.5 billion. You may want to recall how the leader of the official opposition received that news. He said, "This \$32.5-billion spend that they're going to do ... I don't think that's the right approach. It's too much."

We're talking about 160,000 jobs this year alone. The Conservatives think we're spending too much on new hospitals, new schools, retrofitting schools, new transit lines to cut commute times, repairs to aging roads and bridges, four-laning highways in the north, HOV lanes in the GTA and new affordable housing. We think it's a good idea to make those—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Obviously it's the Premier who is having fun with numbers. You've pulled out of the air promises of some one million new jobs in the last year alone. But it's not fun for Ontario's hard-working families, who saw 140,000 jobs leave our province in 2009.

I was proud to be part of the PC government that had inherited a province hit by recession but turned things around and created over one million net new jobs and, while we're at it, 20,000 new long-term-care beds, and we upgraded 16,000 more.

In contrast, Dalton McGuinty has turned the Ministry of Health into his own personal slush fund, giving out sweetheart deals to his friends at the Courtyard Group and bloating the size of his regional health bureaucracies, the LHINs.

I'll ask the Premier, when will Dalton the debt doubler offer Ontario families more than simply cheap talk when it comes to private sector jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's interesting how, as my honourable colleague gets a little bit older, he remembers even more clearly things that never happened.

He longs for the good old days, he tells me, of the Conservative government in Ontario under Mike Harris. I think Ontarians have a different perspective, a different

outlook on the warmth and rosiness of those days. They remember our hospitals being closed. They remember our nurses being fired. They remember the never-ending strikes in our schools. They remember schools being closed. They remember water inspectors and meat inspectors being fired. They remember public services being compromised. They remember a \$6-billion deficit. That's what they remember of those years, and they don't want to go back.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Ontario families long for the day when Ontario will actually again lead Canada in job creation and in economic growth—our historic position in Confederation. Dalton McGuinty's "tax more, spend more, regulate more" policies have laid our economy low and put the mighty province of Ontario on the welfare rolls of Confederation. In fact, under Dalton McGuinty's leadership our province has grown by a paltry 6% total in six years. Premier, with that kind of growth record, why did you expand the size of government by 20%?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: More fun with numbers, no foundation in fact, lots of creativity. One of the things that I find interesting is that we've put forward a dramatic package, for example, when it comes to our tax measures, cutting corporate income taxes, cutting personal income taxes and moving ahead with a harmonized sales tax, something that this party always supported until the idea was presented in this Legislature for the very first time.

At some point in time, it might be of passing interest to the media, but more importantly to members of the Ontario public, if my honourable colleague, on behalf of his party, put forward their plan for the future. We keep doing that every single day. We're proud of our plan. It would be nice to know what they're thinking.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: To the Premier: If you have any kind of plan, it has been a dramatic failure for Ontario families that are seeing Ontario lead Canada in unemployment and job losses.

The Premier asked where these numbers came from; well, from Statistics Canada. When the McGuinty Liberals took office there were 980,000 public servants in Ontario, and today that number is 1.24 million. Premier, that is a 20% increase.

Somebody has to pay for all this. Premier, will it be the Ontario families of today, through higher taxes, or the Ontario families of tomorrow, through the massive debt you've put on future generations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think there's an important recurring theme here that I should help Ontarians better understand: We have a plan and they don't. We favour full-day learning for Ontario's four- and five-year-olds; they don't. We favour family health teams for Ontario families; they don't. We favour nurse-practitioner-led clinics, for the first time in North America, here in

Ontario; they don't. We favour thousands more nurses for our families; they don't.

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Those are the kinds of contrasts I think it's important for Ontarians to understand. We'll do a little more work to make sure that becomes more apparent for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The only part of Dalton McGuinty's so-called plan that seems to be working is how he is bloating the size and cost of government. Ontario's government has ballooned to 1.24 million employees. When Dalton McGuinty took office, the number of government workers making over \$100,000 a year was just over 20,000. Last year, over 53,000 government workers made it on to the sunshine list. That is a 164% increase. When it comes to your regional health bureaucracies, the so-called LHINs, the number on the \$100,000-plus list has grown a shocking 150% in three years alone.

Premier, do you really believe that Ontario families think you won't raise taxes again to pay for your bloated government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, more fun with numbers. It's true that there is a law on the books that requires that anybody making over \$100,000 have that posted. Every single year, some people who are a little bit below that get a bit more, and then they go above that, and suddenly, they're caught by that particular provision, which is a good provision.

But maybe what we really ought to compare is my office to their office when they were in government. In 2002, it cost taxpayers \$3.8 million to run Premier Harris's office. In 2009, it cost taxpayers almost \$1 million less—\$2.9 million—to run my office. That's the real comparison that we should talk about.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Everywhere I travel across Ontario, people tell me that they are worried about the harmonized sales tax. Today, they have yet one more reason to worry.

Last June, my office submitted a freedom-of-information request asking for the impact of the HST on family energy costs. This government denied the release of those records, suggesting that the details were top secret and that releasing them would actually threaten Ontario's economic interests. After months and months of appeals, the government finally released one document—just one document.

My question is this: Why did it take eight months for that information to be released?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's no news that the HST will not affect 83% of consumer purchases, but it will affect 17% of consumer purchases, and energy costs are incorporated into that. That's why, as part of our comprehensive package of tax reforms, we have, in addition to the HST, personal income tax cuts; we have an Ontario tax credit which will benefit 2.9 million Ontario families

and individuals; and we have transition payments—all with a view to ensuring that we ease families over this period of time until the costs are passed down to the consumers.

This is not a surprise. Energy costs will be affected, and we have addressed that through other parts of our package of tax reforms to help families through this.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Ministry of Finance briefing note that we received admits the following: “The increase in typical electricity bill is about \$100 each year; the increase in typical natural gas bill is about \$125 each year.” In other words, Ontario families will be paying \$225 more to heat their homes and keep the lights on.

Why was the McGuinty government trying to hide this information from Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague likes to look at just part of this package and its consequences. I encourage her to take a look at the entire package.

I want to reference again a report which my colleague refuses to read. It's called *Not a Tax Grab After All: A Second Look at Ontario's HST*. It was put out by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. I'll quote what one of the authors said: “No group is significantly worse off or better off as a result of the province's HST plan. Assertions that this is a tax grab have no foundation in reality.”

I think, again, that's an objective, independent third party assessment of our tax reforms, and it's worth considering.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here's the situation: Nearly a year after this Liberal government announced the HST, Ontario families now learn that it will cost them \$225 more to heat their homes and keep the lights on. Doesn't the Premier think that Ontario families have a right to know this information, and if so, why did the government spend eight months fighting its release?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It may have come as a surprise just yesterday to my colleague that the HST will cause some items to go up in cost, but that does not come as a surprise to Ontario families. What I would encourage her to understand and to pass on to Ontarians is the fullness of our plan, the fact that it's comprehensive, the fact that it includes transition payments for our families. We're providing families with \$1,000 and single Ontarians with \$300 in support during the transition.

Again, there is this new Ontario tax credit that we're putting in place which will benefit some 2.9 million Ontario families and individuals. That is permanent in nature as well.

A final point, again in reference to the same report, the one that is entitled *Not a Tax Grab After All*: It points out that poor families are better off, for middle-class families it's a wash, and for our richest families it's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. The same freedom-of-information request also asked for the government's estimate on how much the HST on gasoline is going to cost Ontario's families, but the government is still refusing to release that information. Ontario families are already feeling the economic squeeze, and they have a right to this information. So my question is simple: Why is the government refusing to release it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague appears to be surprised at some of the consequences of the HST. It does affect 17% of consumer purchases, which we are addressing through the other parts of our tax reform—transition payments, permanent income tax cuts and permanent tax credits.

What I'd like my colleague to find a way to speak to as well are the nearly 600,000 new jobs that our package of tax reforms will create. Again, this is the subject of another report which my colleagues don't want to listen to.

I haven't met a single mum or a single dad or a single grandfather or a single grandmother who is not prepared to do whatever it takes to make sure there are jobs there for their children and their grandchildren. That's what our package of tax reforms is about: jobs for us today and jobs for our kids tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The arrogance of this Premier is astounding. I am simply asking the same basic question that Ontario families are asking themselves day in and day out as they do their best to budget and to plan for the introduction of the HST. The McGuinty Liberals are fighting the release of information that will cast the HST as it actually is—a blatantly unfair scheme that will make life more expensive.

Why won't the Premier release all the information he has so that Ontario families know how much more they're going to be paying after July 1 for things like gasoline and housing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to quote this independent report again, which my friends choose to deny. The report is from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Here's a quote from their press release:

“The ... government's HST plan is virtually revenue-neutral when viewed as part of a total tax package that includes increased sales and property tax credits and a significant decrease in personal income tax rates.

“No group is significantly worse off or better off as a result of the province's HST plan. Assertions that this is a tax grab have no foundation in reality.”

That's an independent, objective third party. Again, I'd strongly recommend this study to my colleague.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier seems so proud of his unfair tax scheme that he's practically smug about

it. He says the HST is important, but when faced with very, very simple, straightforward questions like how much extra it will cost Ontario families to turn the lights on or heat their homes or drive to work in the morning, the Premier simply shrugs. If this plan is so good, why is he so afraid to come clean on the cost to families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't recall when any particular piece of government policy has received so much publicity, been the attention of so much media scrutiny and been the subject of so much debate in this House and outside. And that's very important.

It is true that we stand proudly behind our package of tax reforms. My friend would have us freeze in the headlights of an economic recession in a world that's changed. We believe it's important for us to do things to make ourselves stronger and create more jobs—nearly 600,000 more jobs. My friend may dismiss that as being unimportant; we think it's very important. We think it's very important to our families. We think it's important to our future. That's why we're moving ahead with this package of tax reforms.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, when I first heard someone in your caucus say that morale over there is lower than a garter snake on a backcountry road, I thought they were saying it because you didn't like them. I'm not saying this statement came from the member from Don Valley East, but after you made him carry George Smitherman's dirty laundry in the eHealth boondoggle, no one would blame him if he did. Your former health minister is going rogue, with plans to charge Ontario families \$50 a month for tap water and dividing your caucus over whether to make the TTC an essential service. Is your caucus leaking their discontent and going rogue because they don't like you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is what the official opposition has been reduced to. Families are concerned about their jobs, about the future of our economy, about our ability to come together and work in their interests, to ensure that we can make sure that health care is sustainable as the baby boomers march towards their retirement starting next year. Those are the things that weigh heavily on their minds, and all my honourable colleague opposite wants to do is play silly politics. It's a sad statement; it's an unfortunate development.

I look forward, in the supplementary, to something that addresses the economy, health care and education, what we can be doing together to build a stronger Ontario for all the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. I would remind the honourable member as well of comments that I made last week that we should not be addressing questions that pertain to internal affairs of any of the parties, that you should be putting forward questions that pertain to issues of importance to Ontarians.

Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker.

The member for Don Valley East isn't an isolated case. You also proposed a government resolution that you said would be debated over four days. But just like with your job creation promises, what you said and what you deliver are two different things. Debate on the resolution collapsed after just four speakers. It's a clear sign that the Liberal caucus doesn't want to carry the can for any more PR schemes cooked up by Dalton McGuinty's inner circle of unelected political advisors. None of your members in the House, not the Acting Premier nor the Minister of Revenue, stood up to rescue the debate. You must be embarrassed. Will there be more changes in the front bench during prorogation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to say to my colleagues opposite that it's my sense, it's my firmest belief that, ultimately, what we do and say here is not about us; it's about the people of Ontario; it's about their hopes, their aspirations, their values, their longings, their yearnings and their futures. I think they want us to focus on their health care and want us to focus on their economy, their jobs, their environment, their infrastructure and their transit—all those kinds of things. I just don't see any of that in this question, and I encourage my colleague, when the next time comes around for him to ask a question, that he focus on those things that are important to Ontarians.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Labour. On Christmas Eve, four Toronto construction workers died in a tragic scaffolding accident. Last week, another worker fell to his death at a Toronto work site. In response to the earlier tragedy, the McGuinty government launched what they called a safety blitz. I'd like the minister to report to this House, since the blitz began, how many sites have been inspected and how many violations have been documented?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. The member is quite right when she says that we have launched a blitz, a Safe at Work Ontario blitz, where our health and safety inspectors, which we doubled over the last six years—we have 430—are out there every day, today, on those job sites collecting that data.

At the same time that I launched that blitz, I said that it would be a 90-day blitz and at the completion of that exercise, those stats would be reported and put on to our website publicly for all to see.

We continue on that blitz. We are getting those numbers. At the conclusion of those 90 days, I say to the member, those numbers will be made public.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have to question the effectiveness of the blitz if workers are still dying on the job during the blitz. But that's not the only troubling aspect of how the ministry is handling this deadly issue. I have correspondence here from a complainant. He wrote to the

ministry about unsafe scaffolding. Ten weeks after sending this letter, along with photos to illustrate the safety violations, he has yet to hear one word back from this ministry. How can we have any confidence that this minister is serious about cracking down on unsafe workplaces if this minister shows such blatant disregard for a legitimate complaint?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I know I've said this before but it bears repeating: The number one priority for myself and for the Ministry of Labour is the health and safety of our workers. Whenever there is one fatality or one serious injury, that is one too many. That's why our inspectors in the year 2008—those are the stats I have—did 42,000 inspections. Ten thousand of those 42,000 were in cases where they were called in. The other 32,000 were proactive inspections. That's what our inspectors will continue to do, those proactive inspections.

We have also embarked on a comprehensive review of our occupational health and safety, both enforcement and prevention systems. We are always striving to do better when it comes to protecting the workers of Ontario.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. On January 12, all Ontarians, including over 9,000 Haitian-Ontarians, heard the shocking news that Haiti, one of the world's most impoverished countries, was hit by a series of 7.0-magnitude earthquakes causing catastrophic destruction. Hundreds of thousands of people were injured and it is estimated that 200,000 people have been killed. Those who have survived still have very limited access to drinking water, food, medical supplies, shelter and transportation. These basic needs remain a high priority to all relief efforts. In response, I've seen the outpouring of generosity at an event in Scarborough-Rouge River that raised \$125,000 at the Chinese Cultural Centre.

Minister, there is so much more to do for the people—

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member from Scarborough-Rouge River for his compassion for and his dedication to the people of Haiti. The example that the member has provided in his community shows the generosity and the true spirit in Ontario with regard to this catastrophe. I want to thank the member for his involvement in that.

Just a few days following the earthquake, our government provided \$1 million in emergency aid to the Red Cross. Over the last few weeks, we have provided 2,000 kilos of emergency medical supplies through World Vision. We have covered travel costs to bring Ontarians home from Montreal. Ontario's chief forensic pathologist was part of the international disaster victim identification mission.

We've done that. We will do more, and we will continue to liaise with the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Minister. Ontarians should be proud that we're showing the people of Haiti and the international community that Ontario is involved and able to help.

With so much being done and yet so much left to do, I feel it's very important that our government continue to support the relief efforts in Haiti.

At a conference in Montreal that included the Prime Minister of Haiti, the international community attempted to set the stage for Haiti's recovery and committed to continued support. Several international agencies and economist Jeffrey Sachs estimate the cost of rebuilding Haiti is \$10 billion to \$15 billion. There is no doubt that the demand for aid and support will continue in the months ahead. Minister, with billions of dollars needed to rebuild Haiti, how is our government monitoring the relief efforts and how can we ensure that the aid is being distributed effectively to those who need it most?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, I want to thank the member from Scarborough-Rouge River. There's no doubt that there is a long road ahead for the people of Haiti. Certainly the numbers that he said are high. Haiti's recovery is going to be a long process which will demand continued and dedicated effort from the international community.

Currently, Emergency Management Ontario has done an exceptional job and is working closely across government to assess how Ontario can best provide further assistance and ensure effective efforts.

Recent catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami and the earthquake in Haiti have demonstrated Ontario's spirit of generosity and how we are willing to respond to the call to help our neighbours, whether they live in Ontario or thousands of miles away. Our government will proudly continue to represent that spirit.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The minister is a fairly new member of the cabinet, having been picked by Dalton McGuinty over others in the Liberal caucus who have bided their time for some years.

Minister, is it government policy or a McGuinty Liberal policy to consider flying the Canadian flag an act of provocation?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to thank the member opposite for his question. It gives me the opportunity to indicate, which I'm sure all members of the Legislature would agree with, that I'm very proud of being a Canadian citizen and flying the Canadian flag.

I think every opportunity that we have—particularly, I think we have a special opportunity today and in the days ahead, with the Olympics, to express our pride, being a very proud nation which contributes a great deal to the rest of the world. I think we have a perfect example with the Olympics today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: In 2006, a man was arrested for carrying the Canadian flag down the streets of Caledonia, but when someone walked down the same street—they walked down the same street—with a Mohawk warrior flag, he got a police escort. The lawyer defending your government in a civil lawsuit characterized the flying of the Canadian flag as an act of provocation. He's your solicitor, your agent in the courtroom. He wouldn't speak without instructions, so he must be speaking for you. Why does the McGuinty government treat flying a Canadian flag as a provocative criminal act in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would like to refer this supplementary question to the Minister of Community Safety.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: This is the problem we have: We have people who try to incite that type of inappropriate behaviour. I will always support the actions of the Ontario Provincial Police. I will never interfere in operational matters.

This member and every other member in this House should support those types of actions that prevent violence. They should be supporting the OPP. That leader, that member and that side of the House should be ashamed of themselves.

NORTHERN AND RURAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Northern and rural communities are losing their health care services. Emergency rooms, operating rooms, in-patient beds and outpatient services are either closing or threatened with closure.

When local residents ask about these closures, this government tells them that these decisions are in their best interests. Can the minister tell me what policies at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care are guiding the LHINs in making these decisions about rural and northern health care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to have a chance to answer that question. This is an issue, of course, that is facing jurisdictions around the world. As medical care becomes more sophisticated and more highly specialized, it's really important that we find ways to offer that very high-quality health care to all Ontarians, regardless of where they live. This is, in fact, the spirit that is guiding us as we actually improve health care for people right across the province.

There are unique challenges that are faced by people who live in rural and northern areas. That is why we have struck a panel that is helping us to understand the challenges in rural communities and actually give us advice on how we continue to improve services for people right across the province. The northern and rural panel will identify those challenges—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The northern and rural panel actually excludes hospitals, they cannot make recommendations that would increase financial demands and they have held no consultations. They won't till after they make recommendations to the minister.

This government is making decisions for northern and rural communities as if they were urban settings, but they are not. The Ontario Health Coalition understands that rural and northern communities need adequate health care services and they need to be heard. That is why I will be joining them in their town hall meetings across rural and northern Ontario.

The Ministry of Health policies, the lens through which LHINs look at rural and northern health care closures, have an urban bias. Will the minister commit to reviewing those biased policies and listen to the people of northern and rural Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can absolutely assure you that I will listen to the people of northern and rural communities. We are doing that right now and we have asked the panel to come back with advice.

I think it's important to clarify that there are three phases to the work of the northern and rural panel. The first phase is coming to a close. They will be presenting their report in coming weeks. That will trigger the second phase, which is a broad consultation across the province in rural and northern areas so that we can actually hear more from people across the province. The third phase will inform the development of our provincial framework; that is the third and final stage.

We are very interested in hearing what people have to say. We are very interested in the solutions that are coming from rural and northern areas as we work to really improve health care in this province.

1110

TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, we are constantly looking for ways to spur innovation and to make use of green technology. Earlier in the month, a number of pilot projects were announced which achieve both of these objectives by piloting green technology at schools across the province.

These projects provide an excellent opportunity to expose our students and their parents to these innovative, environmentally friendly technologies. I understand that the project types were diverse and that the many innovations are from companies based in Ontario. I would also think that, in the booming field of green technology, there will be much interest in these projects. Would the minister let us know more about the projects and the next steps in these exciting pilot projects?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think that the people of Ontario would be very interested to know that our government is making some significant investments. We have established an important partnership with the Ministry of Research and Innovation, and in doing so we are

investing \$20 million to pilot innovative green projects in more than 155 Ontario schools across 40 school boards.

Now, school boards are very eager to look for ways that they can run their operations more economically. They believe that investing in green technologies will assist them in effecting more cost-effective expenditures in their operations, particularly as they relate to the energy used in their plants. So these project school boards are going to be looking very carefully at how successful they are and where they will be achieving savings, so that they can implement them in other—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Reza Moridi: I am truly excited to see these technologies being piloted across the province, but this is especially exciting news for the constituents and the companies—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Welland, even with your back to me I can still hear you.

Please continue.

Mr. Reza Moridi: —the companies involved and, most importantly, the students who will benefit from seeing green technology at work. With exposure to these projects, it's very conceivable that young minds may be impressed, influencing them to consider a career in the field years down the lane.

Red Maple Public School, a school in the York Region District School Board in my riding of Richmond Hill, received funding through this investment for SolarWall PV thermal photovoltaic walls for the school, which serve to produce both electricity and warm air for the buildings.

I know that there were many projects announced through the pilot, but I am wondering if the minister—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I very much appreciate the question from the honourable member, who's obviously very interested in understanding how our investments in education—

Mr. Howard Hampton: What was the question?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Well, if the honourable member from Kenora's caucus wasn't heckling so much, perhaps you would have heard the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will please come to order. Minister of Education?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The member has identified a particular program that we have in place, and I think it is important that, in addition to the environmental and educational benefits that these pilot projects will have in our schools and our communities, they will also benefit the communities and the local businesses that will be participating in providing the materials in the community.

What school boards have recognized is that when they are able to achieve savings in areas such as this, they are then able to take the dollars they save and direct more to

the students and programs in their classrooms. So this is good news for the environment, it's good news for the people in the community and, most particularly, it's good news for the students in our schools who will appreciate that they are in a green facility and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is for the Premier, and it relates to his government's plans for the construction of the new Dalton McGuinty office tower. At a time when the city of Toronto has millions of square feet of empty office space, when leasing rates are on a downward spiral, we now learn that the government is making application to construct a new office tower which will reportedly be one of the tallest buildings in the city of Toronto, all for the purpose of housing his expanding bureaucracy.

Can the Premier tell us why his government would feel compelled to go into competition with the private sector? When commercial landlords are already on the ropes, why would his government want to spend millions of dollars constructing a new office tower in competition with the private sector?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to respond to the question of the member opposite. Indeed, ORC is responsible for the government's assets. The member is somewhat correct: ORC has indeed put forward a planning application to the city of Toronto to go through the process. What ORC does, on behalf of the taxpayers of this province, is to try and ensure they're getting the highest and best use for whatever properties we have. That's particularly important as we go through tough times, that we look to ORC to provide that kind of leadership to ensure they are getting the highest and best use out of our assets. That is what this is about. They are looking to get the highest and best use out of that asset.

I appreciate the question, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The issue is not for the ORC to take leadership; that's the responsibility of the government.

The question that I have, and perhaps the minister has missed the thrust of the question: At a time when we are in economic turmoil, when the government has a \$25-billion deficit, when the word of the day is "fiscal constraint," how can the government authorize the ORC to spend literally multi-millions of taxpayers' dollars at this point in time to build an office building that would be in direct competition with the private sector, where there are literally millions of square feet of empty office space? Could the government not in fact direct the ORC to work with the private sector to accommodate the government's

needs and not get into competition with the private sector?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is jumping the gun a little bit here. The ORC is looking, as I said, to ensure that they have an opportunity to maximize the value of our assets on behalf of the taxpayers of this province. That's what they are doing here. There's no decision on the part of this government that has been made to build anything at this point in time.

Certainly, though, we take the advice of the member seriously. We always want to make sure that our agencies are acting on behalf of the people of this province in the best possible way. We'll continue to take a look at their actions, and we'll continue to make sure that those actions are responsible when it comes to the management of the public assets. And I'll certainly continue, as minister, to ensure that ORC is making these decisions in the best interests of Ontario taxpayers.

HOME CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. This morning in Brockville, home care workers and health care experts are holding a press conference because home care services are threatened in their community.

When this government quietly ended the moratorium on competitive bidding just over a year ago, we knew it was shamefully choosing private profit over quality care. Ontarians who depend on home care are extremely concerned that their quality of care is threatened.

My question is a simple one: Why won't this government finally take the only sensible step and end competitive bidding once and for all in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite knows that providing care for people in their homes is often what prevents them from going into long-term care or into the hospital. So providing home care is an essential part of the continuum of care that we offer through health.

We are absolutely committed to improving and enhancing services offered in-home. It's the best place for people to be, and we will continue to enhance services for people in their own homes.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect, what this minister should know is that people want quality care. That's what they want in this province. They want quality care. Since competitive bidding was introduced more than a decade ago, the quality of home care has suffered, working conditions have diminished and costs have increased. Ontario is the only province in the entire country with a full competitive bidding system for home care, and even within Ontario no other part of the health care system uses competitive bidding.

How much more evidence does this Premier and his minister need before they do the right thing and end com-

petitive bidding in this province in home care, once and for all?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite is absolutely right. It is about quality, and we are committed to the very highest quality standards as we move forward. We're also committed to continuity of care for patients and stability for health care workers. The new strategy for continuity of care includes those quality measures and public reporting periods.

A competitive bidding process will ensure consistent quality of care for clients and enhance fairness and transparency in selection. Most importantly, it will provide clients with care suited to their medical condition.

We've invested significantly in this sector. Let me highlight some of the things that have been done: \$30 million towards a personal support worker stabilization strategy. That increases the base minimum wage for PSWs to \$12.50 an hour, it provides improved compensation for the travel costs and for travel time, and it—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is also for the Minister of Health. Minister, one of the most telling indicators our constituents use to measure the quality of their health care in Ontario—and frankly, to measure our promise as a government to work tirelessly to deliver excellent health care—are wait times. The length of time it takes for a citizen to access a medically necessary service such as an MRI test will not only affect their health outcomes, but also their confidence in the system as a whole.

Can the minister please tell us what progress has been made in the province to bring down wait times for medically necessary services?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It is absolutely important that the people of Ontario have access to medically necessary services as quickly as possible—in a timely, efficient manner. When it comes to reducing wait times, we're doing three things: We're measuring wait times, we're making these results available to the public and, most importantly, we're bringing wait times down.

Since 2003, we've opened 19 new MRIs, and we are seeing the results of those investments. Since 2003, we've almost doubled the number of MRI exams per year from about 276,000 to over half a million. We've delivered almost 900,000 more MRI scans as a result of these investments and we've seen MRI wait times come down. We are continuing to work to improve access to MRIs, we're increasing capacity and we're ensuring that MRI services—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased with the work we as a government are doing to address wait times across Ontario, but as the member for Ottawa Centre, I have been keenly aware—and my constituents are understandably concerned—that Ottawa has had one of the longest

wait times for MRI scans in Ontario. This is clearly not an acceptable situation for the residents of Ottawa, myself as their MPP, or this government's clear goal of reducing wait times, as you have just shared with us.

Minister, I know you have been attentive to this situation. I was pleased that you came to Ottawa civic hospital in January to tour our facilities and see the situation on the ground for yourself. My constituents would like to know what has been done to remedy the delay in our community for access to MRI scans, and what actions we can take going forward to further reduce the wait times those in need of this important service are facing in my community of Ottawa.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: One of the benefits of actually measuring wait times is that you can make strategic investments where the needs are the greatest. In Ottawa, we've worked very hard with the Champlain LHIN to actually significantly improve MRI access in Ottawa. We've increased the number of MRIs from three in 2003 to eight: three at the Ottawa Hospital, one at the Queensway Carleton, two at Montfort and two at CHEO. Today we're providing almost 20,000 more MRIs every year than in 2004-05.

A new MRI machine was added at the Ottawa Hospital in January. Another machine at Montfort is scheduled to be operational in coming weeks. Combined, these machines will provide an additional 6,000 scans, actually.

Another great initiative in Champlain is that they are developing a region-wide network, a single queue, for diagnostic scans that will improve—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

JOB CREATION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Premier. Premier, your government continually boasts about creating over one million jobs. The reality is that this year alone, your government has presided over the loss of 140,000 jobs. Just one more example of the losses in manufacturing is the Invar plant in Batawa, east of my riding of Durham, in the riding of Prince Edward-Hastings. Premier, this plant is closing, with a loss of 134 jobs. This is 134 families with no income. Furthermore, there were closings of the General Mills and PepsiCo Canada plant in Trenton. Premier, why is there such a wide gap between your government's job numbers and the day-to-day reality in the communities of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always very difficult for the communities, but especially for the families involved, when there are job losses. Sadly, some of that still continues as I believe we reach the tail end of this recession.

But there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I want to reference a Conference Board of Canada report which was just released, that says that Ontario will surpass the national average for the first time in nearly a decade, with growth of 3.5%. Ontario's growth this year will exceed eight other provinces. It will also exceed the national average for the first time in 10 years.

What I say to these families is that we will do everything within our power to ensure that we live up to this prognosis on the part of the Conference Board of Canada and put in place the kinds of measures that give them reason to be hopeful, because of the job creation element that we're putting forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Premier, the evidence is quite the contrary. The only jobs that you're giving out are to your Liberal friends through the boondoggles at eHealth and others.

The government also tells us of their investments in Korea with Samsung. These are all promissory notes, post-dated cheques. Premier, with all of your good news, could you tell us: What number of jobs are you planning to lose next year in the economy of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I want to remind my colleague about that good news from the Conference Board of Canada that we're going to exceed the national average for the first time in 10 years.

We're supporting 25,000 Ontarians who have lost their jobs in our Second Career strategy, and that's a program that my friend and his party oppose. We're cutting corporate income taxes to give our businesses a bit more competitiveness in a highly competitive global economy. My friend and his party opposite don't support that measure. We continue to find ways to work with our businesses and to work with folks who have lost their jobs. In every possible venture and overture that we make, we are opposed in every way by the party opposite.

Again, we look forward to a plan at some point in time on the part of the Conservative Party that says what they're going to do for Ontarians. We have our plan. We're proud of it. We're always looking for ways to improve it. If there are suggestions in this regard, we would welcome them.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Two weeks ago at a press conference at Quanser in Markham, you said: "In a highly competitive, knowledge-based global economy, we're not going to succeed in Ontario by pulling stuff out of the ground." Given this statement, is this why you've chosen not to do anything to avert the closure of the Xstrata smelter in Timmins?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would encourage my colleague to look at all of my statement. I've had the opportunity to speak to this issue on many occasions. The fact of the matter is that the future of our economy is going to depend on growth in a number of areas, including in natural resources.

One exciting new story that keeps coming out of the north has to do with this Ring of Fire, which is part of the James Bay lowlands. It is going to be, as I understand it, the only source of chromite in North America, which is an essential ingredient in stainless steel. It's the biggest find of its kind in North America. It's the only source, in fact, in North America. We think that there's a great op-

portunity for economic development, and we look forward to working with the community to ensure that we develop that in the best possible way.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, it was very clear in what you said, in that you said, "We're not going to grow by pulling stuff out of the ground."

We have a world-class refinery smelter in the city of Timmins. It's the only copper smelter refinery; it's the highest-tech one; it's the cleanest one in the country, and you're doing nothing to avert its closure.

I ask you again: What are you prepared to do in order to intervene and make sure that Xstrata does not shut down its smelter refinery in Timmins? Will you commit to the mining industry of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am absolutely committed to the mining industry in our province. I'm grateful for the wealth that they have created, the families that they have supported and the way that all Ontarians have benefited as a result of that.

I want to remind my colleague about something that he knows. I had a good conversation with Timmins mayor Tom Laughren last week. We spoke about the potential for future uses of that very same smelter. The mayor is looking for a bit of economic support so that they might hire a consultant to help them better understand the opportunities available for future use of that smelter. We are working hard on that. I think we're going to have some good news for Timmins in the not-too-distant future on that particular matter.

I want to thank the mayor and I want to thank the people of Timmins for their continuing optimism and determination to find more opportunity with an existing piece of infrastructure, and we want to work with them to make it a reality.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, during the previous session, I heard many members of the opposition accuse the Ministry of Labour of forcing companies out of business due to over-zealous enforcement activities. While I've heard no such stories emerge out of my riding of Mississauga South, I was nonetheless deeply troubled to hear these shocking statements.

I have, however, heard stories about the dedication and professionalism of the Ministry of Labour inspectors. Moreover, when I talk to local business owners they are appreciative of the efforts of this government, especially when it comes to trying to make them more competitive. Can the minister please explain what ministry inspectors do and put these allegations to rest?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question. I'm grateful for this opportunity to address these allegations.

One of the key roles of the Ministry of Labour is to investigate health and safety incidents in workplaces and to ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Act is followed and enforced. The opposition likes to say that

by dedicating so much time to health and safety and enforcement, my ministry is forcing companies out of business. In fact, by preventing injuries and creating healthier workplaces, we're not only saving lives; we're also saving businesses money. For every workplace injury, each of those incidents costs the WSIB and employers \$120,000 in direct and indirect costs, and that doesn't include the immeasurable emotional impact on our families, our friends and our community. These are all costs which are completely preventable. Thanks to the hard work of the Ministry of Labour staff, we have fewer injuries in the workplace and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

DEFERRED VOTES

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on a motion by Ms. Smith that the federal government support Ontarians in budget 2010.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1134 to 1139.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Will the members please take their seats.

Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion number 172. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Duguid, Brad
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John

Gravelle, Michael
Hoskins, Eric
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Matthews, Deborah
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.

Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ruprecht, Tony
Smith, Monique
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Chudleigh, Ted
Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie
Hudak, Tim

Klees, Frank
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.

Savoline, Joyce
Shurman, Peter
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 49; the nays are 18.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a lonely place here at the top. Durham riding residents are growing more concerned about the new tax this government will introduce on July 1. This morning, we heard of the increase in electricity and natural gas. I had the opportunity to speak with businesses, families, retirees and indeed, Durham residents in walks around my constituency.

I can tell you that they aren't buying the McGuinty government's sales tax campaign for the HST. Their particular concern is over the impact of an added cost of 8% on essential things such as heating, electricity, natural gas and gasoline.

This tax is simply more than Ontarians can afford at this time. It is especially onerous for persons on fixed incomes; for instance, retirees, students, persons on disability, and those of modest income who are already finding it difficult to make ends meet. Those Ontarians don't have expense accounts or sweetheart consulting deals with the McGuinty government.

I would remind the House that time is running out. This government must act now to avoid the damage that they will pursue with the HST, even if they would come clean with the people of Ontario and tell them, "We're changing the tax rules to increase the revenue, to deal with the \$25-billion deficit." That's the long and short of it. Regardless of what they say, they're changing the tax rules, yes, on the income side, yes, on the business side. But the bottom line for the consumers is, you're going be paying more and getting less.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: Grandparents raising their grandchildren receive \$231 for the first grandchild and less for each subsequent grandchild, while unrelated foster parents receive \$900 per month per child. Over the past two years, since we raised this sorry situation, many grandparents have lived in fear of having their meagre temporary care assistance cut off because of this government's flawed directives.

Thanks to one grandmother's courageous two-year fight, the Social Benefits Tribunal issued its decision that she is entitled to the financial support and that the government is wrong in its interpretation of the intent of temporary care assistance. The tribunal concluded that a large and liberal interpretation must be applied to the TCA eligibility decisions.

I am appalled by the minister's callous response to my question yesterday. She said, "I encourage them to appeal

after they have spoken to the administrator of the program in each of their municipalities."

Why is this minister condemning these grandparenting families to further financial and emotional stress, and unnecessarily spending taxpayers' dollars to fight this Liberal government's inhumane treatment of these grandchildren? The tribunal's decision is quite clear. Why would this minister want to inflict further pain on these grandparents, who have set aside their retirement plans to ensure that their grandchildren have a good home with their blood relatives?

On behalf of grandparents raising their grandchildren, the unsung heroes of the child care system, I again implore the minister and the government to take immediate action to introduce regulatory changes to ensure that temporary care assistance is equally delivered across Ontario in accordance with the original intent and the law.

VARIETY VILLAGE

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to speak about Variety Village and the significant role it has played in the lives of children with disabilities.

Variety Village was opened in 1948 as a residential training school for boys with physical disabilities. It championed the goals of independence, access and personal achievement for children with disabilities.

With the construction of the Variety Village sports training and fitness centre in the 1980s, accessibility, inclusion and the achievement of personal goals for people with disabilities found a new home, as those with disabilities actively participated alongside able-bodied children for the first time.

Variety Village is unique to North America and one of the few places internationally to have a mandate which has continued to evolve over the years to meet the diversity of today's disabilities. This evolution has been driven by two significant factors. First, as medical advances have produced a significant reduction in congenital physical disabilities, there have been drastic increases in the identification and diagnosis of developmental disabilities, particularly the alarming increase in children with autism. Secondly, as the children originally served by Variety Village have grown older, their need for specialized programs and facilitated physical activity has continued.

Integration and acceptance are characteristics that make Variety Village the extraordinary place it is. Variety Village is grateful for the support of the Ontario government and is now working with corporations, foundations, individuals and all levels of government to establish a healthy and sustainable funding model to ensure that the important work that it does continues for many years to come.

EASTERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Yesterday at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association convention, my leader

and I and some of my eastern Ontario colleagues met with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus. One of the issues we discussed was the unfair treatment that eastern Ontario receives in comparison to northern Ontario.

In 2006, I introduced a private member's bill to create an eastern Ontario economic development fund, and the McGuinty government adopted my idea just prior to the last election. Much as I'm pleased that they have adopted my idea, it is time the government put its money where its mouth is and funded the eastern Ontario development fund to the same level as it funds the northern Ontario heritage fund. Eastern Ontario has a population that is greater than that of northern Ontario, and yet the northern Ontario heritage fund receives \$120 million a year while the eastern Ontario development fund receives only \$20 million a year.

The wardens would like to see the funding criteria changed so that smaller businesses, those with five employees or more, are able to access funding. This could be done if the fund were administered by a board of local representatives from eastern Ontario rather than having it run by the bureaucrats down here in Toronto. This is the way the northern Ontario heritage fund operates, and I think the eastern Ontario development fund should run the same way.

I call upon the government of Ontario to treat eastern Ontario residents and businesses equally by putting a local board of directors in charge of the eastern Ontario development fund and by funding it equally to the northern Ontario heritage fund.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. David Zimmer: My riding of Willowdale has seen a boom in condominium construction in the last 20 years. In fact, it may come as a surprise to some members that my riding has the largest number of condominium owners in the province of Ontario. That's why I'm pleased today to speak about how our government is helping condominium owners manage their reserve funds.

The Ministry of Consumer Services will be extending the 10-year deadline for condominiums to fund their reserve funds. The Condominium Act, 1998, introduced a 10-year deadline for condominiums registered before May 2001 to maintain their reserve fund requirements. As this deadline approaches, it's appropriate to review the environment within which the industry is operating, including the current economic climate. Working with condo sector partners, our government has determined that extending the reserve fund deadline from 10 to 15 years will give boards more flexibility with their budgets. This change will come into effect July 1, 2010.

This is good news for condominium owners in Willowdale. It's a significant step in responding to the needs of condo owners, and it would mean that condominium corporations registered before 2001 will have an additional five years to ensure that their reserve funds are adequately funded.

BOWL FOR KIDS SAKE

Mrs. Julia Munro: Big Brothers Big Sisters describes Bowl for Kids Sake as their premier "fun-raising" event, where people get together with friends, family and co-workers and have a fun time bowling in support of Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programs in their communities. I encourage everyone to get involved in the important fundraising event.

York region's Big Brothers Big Sisters has six more bowling days scheduled in the region of York and in the town of Bradford in my riding. Bowling days are also scheduled across Canada, and you can find out when and where to participate at the website www.bowlforkidsake.ca.

1510

Last Sunday I was pleased to participate in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of York region Bowl for Kids Sake fundraiser at the Baldwin Rock'N Bowl in Georgina. This is part of a nationwide fundraiser.

It would be unfair of me to reveal my own team's score, but I want to thank the organizers for providing an exciting day of competition, with all of the money going to a good cause. The turnout for the event was great, and all of the alleys were fully booked as members of our community took the time to come and bowl for a very good cause.

ROTARY CLUB OF BRAMALEA

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I rise today to recognize the Rotary Club of Bramalea. I had the privilege of participating in the 45th-anniversary celebration of the Rotary Club of Bramalea. This organization is made up of men and women in my community who dedicate their time and energy to make the lives of their fellow community members better.

The Rotary Club of Bramalea was founded in 1965 and has been a fixture in our community. Over the last five years, the Rotary Club has raised over \$50,000 for the fire safety building at Chinguacousy Park; \$50,000 for the Wellspring foundation; money for a charity in Mexico; and has raised over \$2,000 for the Feed the Children organization for kids in Guyana. The club also supports the Salvation Army food bank and Polio Plus, and started the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program, which now runs all across Canada.

The money raised comes from the community from the 50/50 draws held at the Brampton Battalion home games and various fundraisers which are held throughout the year.

The success of this organization comes from volunteers such as Mr. Jerry Vanderklaauw, who is the director of international services for the Rotary Club of Bramalea. Jerry has faithfully volunteered his time to ensure that the organization maintains its goals in helping the community.

The work done by this organization deserves to be recognized, and I want to wish this organization continued success.

DEREK WHITSON

Mr. Pat Hoy: It is day 12, and what an incredible performance all Canadian athletes are putting on in Vancouver. And the excitement and thrill don't end on February 28, as an elite international competition will continue with the Paralympic Winter Games in March.

I'm proud to recognize Derek Whitson of Chatham, who will be representing Canada in the Vancouver Paralympic Games as a member of the sledge hockey team.

Derek was born with cerebral palsy. At just 20 years of age he has already travelled to several continents, playing football and sledge hockey for Canada. This will be Derek's first Paralympic Winter Games, but he competed in the 2007 Pan Am Games and world championships in the football seven-a-side. Earlier this season Derek helped Team Canada take home the silver medal at the 2009 World Sledge Hockey Challenge.

An accomplished artist, Derek has donated his artwork to support fellow athletes through the Canadian Athletes Now "Art of Believing" art auction.

Derek is an inspiration to all young people of what can be achieved if you believe in your dream and have the courage and determination to carry it through. This dream is a culmination of hard work and tireless dedication. His achievements show us that nothing is impossible.

Derek and his teammates will begin their quest for gold starting March 13. I wish them and the entire Canadian team good luck. Once again we say, "Go, Canada, go."

CHRISTINE NESBITT

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's my pleasure to stand up before the House today and commend London native Christine Nesbitt on winning an Olympic gold medal in speed skating on Thursday. I had the pleasure of watching her compete against her contenders, and I felt proud that one of our own is the world's top speed skater.

Christine developed her love for speed skating in the London Speed Skating Club, where she was a member for many years. While we were all watching Christine compete in Vancouver, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous impact she has had on young athletes in London. Our local heroes have the greatest impact on our youth, and Christine has done an excellent job at being one.

Christine's hard work, dedication and commitment to her goals make her a strong role model for anyone who wants to achieve success. Her work ethic and passion have greatly influenced our growing athletes in London, who see her as an inspiration.

I wish Christine all the best in her future endeavours and thank her for being an exemplary athlete and role model for many people in London and in Ontario. I want to congratulate her, her family and all the people in Ontario for her success.

Thank you for allowing me to do this statement.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following changes be made to the ballot list for private members' public business: Mr. Hudak and Ms. Jones exchange places in the order of precedence such that Mr. Hudak assumes ballot item number 73 and Ms. Jones assumes ballot item number 65; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot item number 65.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to rise today and to present once again a petition that affects the people of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services" that affect families and businesses each day. A list of those costs includes the following: natural gas; electricity; gasoline; coffee; newspapers and magazines; home heating oil; "haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements"—the list goes on; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which" now "costs upwards of \$600 to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I am pleased to sign to support this and present it to Jordan, one of the pages in their last week here at the Legislature—I think.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have petitions with regard to health care in Parry Sound–Muskoka. They read:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare has undertaken an operational audit to identify efficiencies and reduce costs; and

“Whereas we recognize that the status quo is not an option; and

“Whereas rehab services are of paramount concern to the residents of the region where income levels exclude them from accessing other alternatives; and

“Whereas the deficit recovery plan will not balance the budget;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Health provide additional operational funding of 5% amounting to \$3.4 million to ensure the continuation of services as described in the deficit reduction plan submitted to the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN dated January 29, 2010.”

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Petitions? Petitions? If there are no further petitions, orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PENSION BENEFITS
AMENDMENT ACT, 2010LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 18, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act / Projet de loi 236, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act. We've heard the leadoff speech by our critic, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka—excellent remarks. In fact, I had a breeze-through over lunch period to look at those remarks to make sure that I don't repeat them.

1520

But I just want to put on the record with a bit of liberty here this afternoon that we're all making remarks with respect to the Olympics: “Go, Canada, go.” I'd like to add my voice to that, but more importantly, the ski club that my family and I belonged to for a long, long time was called Kirby Ski Club, and it has now changed its name to Brimacombe. I don't why they did that, but nonetheless—Matt Morison is skiing this Friday, and he's from that club. He's a young fellow. I met him, but not in his current role as the world champion in parallel

snowboard. They are having an event this Saturday at the Brimacombe ski club, and I hope to participate in that.

Now on to more serious things. Not that that isn't serious, but go, Matt, go; and go, Canadians, go. They're all doing a great job out there. Not to change this into a tough topic, a tough time or a tough voice—we're likely going to support this technical bill. Our critic has been very diligent in bringing to our attention some of the reports, not just the Arthurs report—that's the expert panel—but also in a broader way. He has an advisory group that he works with on financial issues as our critic. They're saying that there's a lot of tinkering, if you will—I think that's one of the terms they used—and the technical thing will help some pension groups. I'm going to comment in the very limited time that I'm going to have here, but I just want to put some frame around this.

Ontario regulates 4,100 defined benefit plans of the 11,000 defined benefit plans in Canada. So we have a good one third of all the plans right here in Ontario. The solvency requirements for pension plans ensure they're able to pay out the benefits as promised in the terms of the plan. Now, plans are also required to fund according to going concern rules. Those are big distinguishing features. That's the problem with the whole topic of pensions. It's very technical—legal references also, with respect to actuarial valuations, if you will. “Going concern” just means that it's presumed that the business will continue to go.

I think we should also recognize that these pension difficulties we have in Ontario are not unique to Ontario. In fact, I give Jim Flaherty, the Minister of Finance, federally, full marks because he has been very progressive in leading the debate in Whitehorse during December 2009. He had a meeting in Whitehorse with all the finance ministers across Canada.

Not only that, I know firsthand from my children who live in England that it's a huge problem there. Gordon Brown has convened an expert panel with pretty much the same thing: how to value a pension during a time of economic—the great recession, as it's being referred to in much of the literature today. I think it's important to put that in context. Now is no time for Joe Public to jump out of some investment because the investment's numbers are down. Where would you go with the money? Where would you put it?

The same question should be asked of a plan manager. Where would they put it? Any person who has been wisely—and I hope I encourage all people to invest for their own security into the future. That's part of the discussion here, that money is a temporary store of value and, as such, it has a value fluctuation. If you look at the market—and I'm surprised at some of the experts here, saying that they're going to insure or guarantee. If you can guarantee something in the market, you are more than a prophet or a futurist. You're working magic, because the commodities themselves within the places where we live—the whole discussion on whether or not there's a monetary crisis is a much more appropriate question right now.

There are a number of very interesting textbooks on the topic of where you would put asset value. Would you have it in gold—there's some speculation there—or in resources generally? Would you have it in uranium? Would you have it in paper? When you look at the currency debate going on between the United States and China, or China and Brazil, what kind of currency would you like? Many investors today in the currency market are making 10% and 15% a day.

Now, pension funds are regulated with respect to what and how much can you have in a particular sector of the economy, in the marketplace. These are important rules, and those valuation rules that were mentioned in this are a point of discussion.

Also, when you look at pensions, they're based on working for a company for a long period of time. In Ontario today, more people are losing their jobs than getting jobs, so what company is going to assume the liabilities? Putting this in context, if you look at the biggest corporations in this province, currently and within the last little while, all of them have discrepancies in their pensions. The big strike going on in Sudbury now is Vale Inco, and the major issue central to that whole agreement is the pension liability. We also know that a few years ago, Stelco had a problem. It still does, and it's a pension liability issue. General Motors has a huge liability.

The only pensions that really aren't subject to these liabilities—that is, the loss of market presence or failure of the product or of employment—are probably the public sector pensions. I don't say that with any malice. I'm saying that the employer of record on public sector pensions basically is the taxpayer, so those pensions will go on forever.

To add credibility to the broader comments I am making on pensions, I look at an article in the *Globe and Mail* this morning, "Not by Pensions Alone." This article is really quite a well-written article and says that federal public servants "have had benefits that few other Canadians have enjoyed, and it's not unreasonable to expect that, in today's climate, some of those should be called into question."

"The most obvious place for reform is the share employees pay into their plans. In 2007-08, federal employees made only 32% of the \$3.8 billion in total contributions.

"In many other plans, by contrast—the public services of Ontario, Quebec and Alberta; and the municipal, elementary and secondary education sectors of Ontario—employees and employers have a joint" contribution of 50%.

When you look at those contribution rules, these are very important. Who owns the liabilities and who owns the surpluses? These are questions that will come into play.

The bill was introduced by the finance minister on December 9. A year before that, he had commissioned the expert panel, of course, and a number of other experts to give advice, which I think is an important thing to do.

It says, "If approved by the Legislature, the government measures would provide temporary solvency funding relief"—that's a very good one. What does that mean, "temporary solvency funding relief"? What it means is they're going to extend the time that they will be able to make up the shortfall in the pension plan—that's all it means—provided they're an ongoing business. It continues: "through regulations, retroactive to September 30, 2008. If passed, the eight measures would include:

"An extension of solvency amortization periods from five to 10 years with the consent of active members or their collective bargaining agent and retired plan members": In fact, if there is a liability, they're going to give them 10 years to pay it as opposed to five. I think it's a good plan; otherwise, the plan has to wind up.

"Consolidation of previous funding schedules": There are a number of interventions that have been made over the years, often by the government, some by the plan administrators. Those have caused problems. In fact, I'd say the biggest problem that we're dealing with right now is the whole "too big to fail" decision made in 1993.

"Deferral of catch-up payments to provide one year of cash flow relief": There's a questionable one. If they're that shaky, if the plan in such a failed condition, I think the employers and the employees have to work together and look at each one quite uniquely. How vulnerable is the business? Is it about to collapse, or is it just a case that the market is down, and they have no cash flow to deal with their payments?

Look at each business; don't have one rule that's going to give some other plan manager controls that they perhaps shouldn't have.

This is important here: "Permitting the use of actuarial gains." That's just a way of recalculating the net present value of an asset. Also looking at it, what are the liabilities against the plan as well as the employer and their ability to pay? So I think that's a good one; and to reduce the annual cash payment to the plan sponsors.

1530

Now, any time they have a payout or a reduction of the mandatory payments, they should look at each one of those very carefully. It's fine in the public sector because the government, I guess, has deep pockets. They can carry a debt or a deficit. We see in Ontario a deficit of \$25 billion and we've almost doubled the provincial debt. So we have a huge hill to climb and it's a big hole we've fallen into in the last six or seven years. It's tragic, quite frankly. This is a debt that will be paid for by the pages sitting here today. We're spending more than we're earning by almost \$3 million an hour.

So in the context of this budget debate, that's an important observation. This is not unique. I don't say it's even particularly caused by Premier McGuinty, but what actions is he taking to prevent it? When we look at other jurisdictions in other provinces—let's look at the best practices. Some other provinces aren't suffering the job losses that we're suffering. What is it that they're doing that we're not doing?

Another provision under this legislation: “Temporary limitations going forward on certain contribution holidays.” Now, there’s one thing I don’t agree with at all. In fact, I would say when we were in government we provided contribution holidays to the MUSH sector—municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals—and we should not have. When you calculate and there is a surplus and it’s an ongoing plan, you can’t tell me that everyone knows the market is going to be a steady, positive slope line. That’s not how it works.

Long-term economics would tell us that there is a fluctuation in the economy, and that’s why I’m not in support of those ongoing contribution holidays. FSCO or the pension commission should have definite ministerial oversight and very exceptional rules on the contribution holidays. Everyone should be paying their way, and it’s proof now that when you look at all the pensions in Ontario—all of them without exception—they are basically, by current valuations, in deficit. Teachers’ pensions, OMERS, HOOPP, all of them are in deficit.

The problem is that we’re evaluating them at a time when the market is at the bottom. I think things will improve. I’d like to put a little bit of humour in here. I think they’ll improve after October 2011, when there’s a change in government. That’s my belief, because if you think that you can solve all the problems in Ontario or in your family by spending money, you’ve got it all wrong. We have almost doubled the spending and doubled the debt in Ontario. It is not better. Hospitals are in trouble. The Toronto school board had a \$17-million deficit. So it’s going south rapidly. I don’t blame it all on Premier McGuinty, but I don’t see a very consistent plan and I’m very disappointed as an Ontario citizen. But I do want to admit that this is a more complex issue than we would often like to give reference to.

In the very few minutes I have left, I’m going to talk about a couple of items here. I have quite a few notes. One of the big ones is a partial windup. I had the privilege, when I was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, of sitting through one of the more important cases in pension law or pension reform: the Monsanto case, which was a partial windup. That case—which was viewed by the experts, not by politicians—was about how to apportion the assets of the pension to the members of the plan; one of the divisions was closing down. The attribution rules they used to apportion the real-time value, the current value, of assets during the time that they contributed—what was their base salary? To look at those schedules of how they tried to calculate that—it’s virtually impossible.

But I’m going to say that “As a transitional matter, partial windups can still be ordered prior to what will apparently be the effective date of the grow-in changes.” Some of that sounds a bit—growing in allows you to contribute and grow into a plan, perhaps leaving early. “The grounds for such partial windups are essentially unchanged from the current rules. In addition, the current rules relating to partial windups continue, including the provision which caused the Monsanto effect, as part of

the transitional provisions. However, while partial windups continue to exist, annuities will not be required to be purchased by any partial windup after April, 1987.”

That’s important. You would not want to be buying an annuity in a time when the market is so low. You’d like to buy annuities when the market is high, or the interest rate is high, so you can calculate future value at a different rate.

Full plan windups: “Three changes are made in the pension reform bill to when the superintendent can order a partial or full windup: (i) the test for when employee termination can cause a full plan windup will be whenever ‘all or substantially all’ of the employees are terminated.” There’s a case there where the superintendent of financial institutions will look at it, and it says a partial windup is “to be ordered where the purchaser or successor does not provide a pension plan; and (iii) a full plan windup cannot be ordered simply because the specific location is closed. These changes are all consistent with the elimination of” a partial windup plan.

So that’s what happens often. A company—for instance, let’s take a very successful company in Ontario, Research in Motion. Some people here may even have shares of it. I’ve watched that stock go from about \$30 to \$130; now it’s around \$60. Here is the issue: in three years, the iPhone—

Mr. Mike Colle: You should have bought, John. Did you buy?

Mr. Michael Prue: He should have sold.

Mr. John O’Toole: Yes.

Right now, if you look at the BlackBerry—we all have one; it’s mandatory equipment here—its technology is now becoming dated because it has a keyboard. The iPhone doesn’t have a keyboard. You can call up an icon which is a keyboard, but it’s not a mechanical keyboard, and I think that’s one of the BlackBerry’s shortcomings. If you happen to get water on that phone, it’s fried. I know many people who have had their BlackBerrys fried.

But the point is, those stocks are probably going to have less value. I can recall that one of the big issues when we were in government was—I think the example was the teachers’ pension plan—the way they evaluate the percentage of your portfolio in a specific sector. They had Nortel shares, and Nortel shares also ran through the roof: from an average of about \$35 to \$130. Well, it made their apportionment within the plan greater than is allowed. They appealed to the board to be able to hold on to the shares, and the board ruled against them. They had to share them. A few weeks—if not months—later, the shares were, as we all know, worth half or even less. They began falling after John Roth, I think it was; they fell off the board, and they were still out trying to push that stock.

So I feel badly, as well, in the context of the people from Nortel and the rules around that. I think there should be rule changes so that the people who in good faith gave up salary throughout their working careers can be assured of some kind of security in their latter years.

In this particular thing, I take the advice of the hard-working experts who have done the work. Our critic has done a very good job of giving us information, as well as some of the people I've talked to.

One last comment that I want to make: I worked for General Motors for 31 years. That plan group has a group called GenMo. I want to thank Brian Rutherford, John Vanderhorst, Joe O'Neill and a few other people. They asked—and I'm asking on the record today—that the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, allow them to have a seat at the table on what they call an advisory committee on a specific plan.

I spoke to another fellow the other day—his name is Karl Zimmerman—who was very active in the union side with General Motors employees, and they also want a voice. That does not mean that their voice should allow them to overturn the orders of the minister, but I think that they, in good faith throughout their working careers, tried to contribute to the company and look after themselves and were somehow hung up. It's partially the fault of the market, partially the fault of government and partially the fault of, perhaps, the company itself. So I'm asking that they be allowed to be on the advisory committee and follow the rules of that committee.

With that, thank you for allowing me the very few minutes. I had asked for unanimous consent for another half an hour.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Denied.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd give it to you.

Mr. John O'Toole: No? Well, once again, I—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Questions and comments?

1540

Mr. Michael Prue: It is always a pleasure to listen to my learned colleague from Durham, especially when he talks about pensions. I have had the opportunity to not only listen to him in this House, but I've had the opportunity on finance committee to sit around in the wee hours of the morning talking about political issues, and one of the things that he feels most passionately about is pensions here in Ontario. So I hope that the members opposite and the government listen to what he has to say.

I sometimes hear things that I find a little bit far-fetched, I sometimes hear things that I feel are a little bit beyond the pale coming from my colleagues in the Conservative Party, but this is not one of those times. This is a time when he is talking absolute sense about what we need to be looking at. Surely everyone in this room understands the number of people who are aging and who are going to be looking to pensions in the next few years. We all know—anybody who looks at demographics at all—about the bubble that is coming. We all know about the boomers, of which I am one and many of the people in this room are as well, who are going to be aging and looking for pensions. We as a government have to look at how we are going to deal with that.

The bill is an appropriate bill, to look at it, and the suggestions that have been made by my friend from

Durham are absolutely spot-on in terms of the suggestions he is making, the people that he is suggesting should be talked to and how the government should proceed down the road, because to do absolutely nothing is going to send a whole generation of people known as the boomers, who have contributed largely to the success of this province, into penury. They're going to send them into a time when they are not going to have the money in their pensions that they should.

I implore the government to look—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. Comments and questions?

Mr. Mike Colle: It was interesting listening to the member from Durham give advice on whether or not RIM stock was going to go up or down. I think a lot of people in the past underestimated the value of RIM and have regretted, including myself, not appreciating the incredible investment RIM is.

I know he was part of a government that drank the Kool-Aid at the time, and I know they did some pension changes right in this chamber here that I think he regrets. The interesting thing is, though, that governments of all stripes have not paid enough attention to pensions. I think it's obvious that there's an imperative to pay attention. That's what this bill begins to do, on the recommendations of Professor Harry Arthurs, because in many ways, pensions were almost some kind of magic black box that people paid very little attention to, especially the workers who worked for so many years and contributed so many dollars. Yet they found out in troubled times, as we have in the financial markets today, that it is critically important that governments protect workers when it comes to pensions, and there's a responsibility from companies and workers to ensure that pensions are viable and sustainable.

I think the challenge right now is to overcome such a great hurdle and years of neglect of this important file, not only for those who have the fixed benefits from pensions that they derive, but for the 70% of Ontarians who do not have a pension. Basically, they are the majority. How do we ensure that they have reasonable protection after they've contributed to so many years of work? That's another challenge that government has.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to add some comments to the speech from the member from Durham on Bill 236, which is the first of the government's promised pension bills. Of course, they said there are going to be two bills, as has been mentioned. As he stated, this one is kind of tinkering around the edges; we're expecting the second bill to be a lot more substantive. But I would like to thank the member from Durham. He works so hard for the people of Durham and, as always, has knowledge of so many different subjects, including pensions.

He did talk at length about valuations of defined benefit pension plans. That is certainly of critical importance, how we value these defined benefit plans,

whether they're counting on investment income to be solvent.

I think he mentioned the Netherlands. I know in my original speech I pointed out how in the Netherlands a few years back they changed the valuation system. They changed the way of valuing pensions to the same way they value insurance companies and banks—a lot tougher rules, in other words.

As the member from Durham pointed out, he thought it was a mistake when there were contribution holidays that came into effect a few years back. I would tend to agree with that. I think the more conservative approach we take to these things, the better, because having the plan solvent is in the interests of everyone, particularly those who are going to be benefiting from pension plans down the road.

He mentioned England. They've gone to a national system, PADA, that became this NEST program, a supplemental auto-enrol system. There's a lot of changes, many that probably should be national. But in Bill 236, tinkering around the edges a little bit, there are some things that are positive. I know the member from Simcoe—Grey has spoken in favour of the consolidated—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from Durham has two—

Mr. John O'Toole: No, there's one more.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry. The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As they say, I'm number four.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: You're number one with us.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know I'm number one with many of you.

I just want to say the government is attempting to do something in this legislation—and I listened to the comments made by the honourable member—that deals with part of the issue, but I've got to say it's a pretty small part. The reality is that most people in this province don't have a pension. In reality, nobody in this Legislature has a pension, let alone people in this province. I say what we need to do is look at reform around pensions that includes all people. It includes people at the minimum wage, includes people in this Legislature, and includes all those people in this province who—

Laughter.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: People laugh, but the reality is we're not any different than anybody else.

My point is that we need to have a regime that allows people to have a pension they can retire on. The reality for most Canadians and most Ontarians is that they're going to retire on a small Canada pension if they're lucky. They may get the full amount if they retire at 65, but most people will go early, so it will be reduced. Then they have a small old age pension. Between the two, they're lucky if they draw \$1,700 to \$1,800 a month to retire on. They're lucky if they get that. The reality is, we all know as homeowners that by the time your house is paid and you pay all of your utilities, your taxes, your insurance, your groceries and just the regular things that

you need to live, if you have a single income of \$1,800, you're not going to go very far.

It is clear to me that in this province we need to have major pension reform. That's why Andrea Horwath has proposed that we change and go to an Ontario pension plan so that we're able to put on top of CPP a similar type of Ontario pension plan that allows all Ontarians at least to get a minimum pension so that when they retire, between the combination of an Ontario pension plan, a Canada pension plan and the old age pension, they have an income of somewhere over \$2,500 a month. I think we need to get into that debate, and we should have done it many years ago.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Now the member from Durham has two minutes to reply.

Mr. John O'Toole: For all the people who spoke, there were a couple of very important points that have been made by the members. Summarizing them is important.

Only about 38% of people actually have a pension. The vast majority do not have a pension, so I think what we're trying to do is provide this universal benefit, which is even more complex. I think it would be important for companies themselves to get the rules straight on the CCAA; that's the bankruptcy protection act. I think we need to have successor rights outlined more clearly in that particular legislation. I would encourage all members to talk to Jim Flaherty on that.

I also think that we need companies to invest, so we can't be so prescriptive that no one wants to invest here. But in fairness, we cannot retroactively disadvantage people who, in good faith, contributed to a pension, regardless of whether it was public or private. I think there needs to be commitments there.

There are two types of pensions, the defined benefit is primarily what we're talking about, where I give so much of mine and the employer generally—often employees don't pay, which is not a good thing. They should be engaged in it, and there should be more transparency. But the important part is, it would be a defined benefit. At some future date, I would get around 50% of my pension plus the CPP kick-in and the Gains supplement.

1550

Here's the most important thing: Most companies or jurisdictions are looking at a whole new type of pension called a defined contribution plan. That's a very important change, and they are doing it in other countries. What that means is, the employer of the day gives their share and the employee of the day gives their share and it's put into a pension trust. There might be a number of different instruments within that trust fund that you can invest in. That's the future, because employers themselves will not last. They will morph into subdivisions or be amalgamated or be dislodged through the market; they won't exist. So I suspect it's up to the individual. Give them the tools and the tax regime to accumulate wealth over their lifetime.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I want to just interrupt for a moment to remind members that, pur-

suant to standing order 38(a), the member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Labour. That will be debated today at 6 pm.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand here to talk about pensions. This is a topic that, 10 or 15 years ago, I probably would have not stood in this place and cared a whole lot about. Perhaps it's a factor of aging; perhaps it's a factor of being one of those boomers on the cusp; but it is a time that people around this province are starting to look at pension plans, how they are vested, how they are being funded, whether governments have the ability to carry through with them, whether companies that once were seen as giants, like Nortel or General Motors, are any longer able to afford them. We are starting to look, I guess, at our own mortality. We're starting to look at whether or not the pensions will be there for us.

There was a book I read many years ago: *Boom, Bust and Echo*. Although I had read many books on demographics before, this was a very popular one; it was a very readable one. It is one that people across this province took an opportunity to read, and I think across this country as well. It simply showed, in very real terms, how consumer cycles changed. It showed how pension plans and thoughts changed. And it showed how this whole bubble, which is unique to Canada and Canada alone, that baby boom between 1946 and 1966, impacted not only our growth and our potential as a province and a country but will continue to impact us as it moves down the cycle.

Next year, 2011, is the first year of the baby boomers reaching 65, that magic retirement age at which people no longer retire, unfortunately, because many of them work until they drop. But in the meantime, people are looking at their pension plans and are looking at what is going to happen to them when they turn 65, or before, or after. They're looking at whether or not they're going to be able to do all of the things that they dreamed of.

I remember as a boy watching on television that they had this insurance ad called Freedom 55. I remember talking to my grandfather when I was only about 10 years old about the number of days and months and years. I had it right down to a science; I could tell him the number of years, months, days and hours until I turned 55 and I would be free. He was constantly amazed at me because I could do those mathematics in my head. He told me that that was a good plan, but I might not be able to retire when I was 55; it was a great dream but I might not be able to do it.

Well, six years after I turned 55 I'm still here and I'm still working, I guess in part because this place has no insurance. We have no pension. Not that I'm sad to be here, because I come here every day and the people at the front desk and the side desks and the east and west doors will tell you I walk into this place and they all yell at me, "Another day in paradise," because if I don't say it first they will, because that's the way I see this. This is a job that I find paradise. But I want to say that for many

people who struggle in a manufacturing sector, in an office with all its politics, and in places where they are simply going to make a living, it's much more difficult.

So what we have to do on behalf of all of those boomers, what we have to do on behalf of all those people in generation X and the ones to follow as well, is look and say, how is the system going to work for them? How are people going to be able to look to the future and say, "I have security. What I wanted to do when I was 55, Freedom 55, or Freedom 65 or Freedom 75, is to have enough money to carry out the balance of my life in a meaningful and constructive way, to be able to travel, to be able to visit with my grandchildren, to be able to live in my own home till I die, or any other thing that comes to be?"

We in the New Democratic Party believe that this is doable. It's a difficult task; I'm not saying for a moment it is not. But it is no more insurmountable than all those years ago when the federal government sat down and came up with the Canada pension plan. There were people at that time who thought it was impossible. There were people at that time who thought, "How can you propose a pension? You're going to bankrupt the entire country."

It did not bankrupt the entire country. We simply learned to adapt and get used to it and pay out those funds. I have not heard of an Ontarian or a Canadian in the last 10 or 15 years who begrudges a single penny that is paid to the pensioners of this province. We look and we understand that those people have made a contribution. They have made a contribution while they worked. They have made a contribution in times of war. They have made a contribution in terms of how they brought up their family in difficult circumstances and put them through school and higher education. They have made a contribution to the economic livelihood of this province, and it worked.

All we are saying is that we have to look at the next generation. We have to look at the Canada pension plan and determine its adequacy. Is it any longer adequate to pay people \$1,000 or \$1,500 or \$1,200 a month and expect that they're going to live comfortably and securely on that basis alone? Quite frankly, it is inadequate. More and more pension experts, from Mr. Arthurs on up and on down, are saying it is not sufficient.

Only 35%—or we've heard some statistics at 38%—of the people of Ontario have a pension. We need to try to make sure that that is 100%. Is it doable? I think so. Is it a priority? I think so. Should the government be doing more in this regard than I've seen them do to date? Yes, I do think so. If it is not entirely 100% the best economics in terms of what you are thinking, I am asking the government members opposite to look at what is the best politics in what you are thinking. What is the electorate going to demand in the next few years? What are they going to say they want the politicians to do? I am absolutely convinced that those people between the ages of 45 and 65 today, those boomers who are coming up in rapid numbers, those boomers who, by and large, have an

80% or 90% turnout at the polls, are going to insist that this is something that needs to be looked at. We in the New Democratic Party believe that those 35% who have a pension need to be increased.

We would increase the benefit levels of the Canada pension plan. This would draw on the existing economies of scale, risk-sharing and administrative efficiencies of the plan.

We believe that a whole lot more can be done. I watch in dismay and I listen in this House when the government opposite, who are Liberals or purport to be Liberals, keep quoting Stephen Harper. They keep quoting their partner Stephen. They keep talking about how the government in Ottawa and the government in Toronto are one and the same, how they're on the same wavelength. Well, I can only ask, please don't be on the same wavelength when it comes to pensions.

In this morning's newspaper there was a picture of Stockwell Day, all smiles—I'm sure they picked the picture on purpose—in the *Toronto Star*, talking about what they are hoping to do in terms of pensions. They are zeroing in on those people who are federal public employees. They are saying that the federal public employees' pension plan is too rich and they want to claw back some of those monies. Well, I have to tell you, I am dismayed at that. All of those people who would stand up and say, "Yes, let's claw back those civil servant pensions," as they say sometimes here in the province of Ontario, simply don't understand how those pensions came to be and what they are.

1600

For some 21 years before I became a full-time elected politician, I worked for Her Majesty's government in Canada. I worked in the immigration department throughout that entire period—21 years—and I was involved in the life of the immigration department: doing what I was told to do, working within the union, advocating on behalf of many things, often getting my name in the paper for some of the positions that I took. But one of the things we did and we understood and was instructed to us was that we were required, on a monthly basis, to pay 8% of our gross salary into the pension plan. That's what I paid; I paid 8% of my gross salary into the pension plan.

I only spent 21 years in the federal public service. Many, many people spend 35 or 40 years before they retire; I worked there about half that time. But I remember throughout all of that period that I worked that I paid 8% of my gross salary into a pension plan that was going to be indexed.

People made a lot more money than me in those days. You can look at it and say, "Look at all those civil servants in Ontario or in the federal government who make more money than the public sector today"—but this is very cyclical. During most of the period that I worked there, I made less money than people in the private sector. I was offered on several occasions double my salary to leave the federal immigration department to go work for law firms advocating on behalf of immi-

grants on the other side of the Immigration and Refugee Board—to stop on this side and go to that side. I didn't do it, in part because of my pension, in part because of what I had come to believe was in lieu of the salary, which was not as high, and of which I paid 8%.

For all those people who today want to somehow stand up there and say, "You ought not to have that pension" after I paid into it—it's disgraceful. For the Harper government to look at that and say they're going to take it away is not only illegal, it is disgraceful. I have no doubt in my mind that if this is challenged in any court of the land, the people who have paid 8% of their salary for 20, 30 or 40 years are going to win, because no court is going to say they can just take that away. It's not even their money to take away. It was part of the collective agreements; it was part of what people paid in; it was part of what the government paid in order to ensure that the civil service salaries in those days were consistently lower on a daily payment basis than one could have made in the private sector. That may not be true today, but it was true throughout the entire time that I worked there, until 1993.

I have to laugh when I see politicians standing up and talking about doing that kind of thing. Occasionally, I hear that around this chamber: taking away the civil servants' pension. I would be the first to acknowledge that we don't have one here in Ontario. I think the mistake of the Harris government, the first, number-one mistake, was the amalgamation of the cities against their wills across this province. The number-two mistake was to take away the pensions of the people who work in this room.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I agree.

Mr. Michael Prue: There is my colleague from Thornhill. We don't often agree; he agrees. That was the number-two worst mistake that government made. I would only hope that the government, this government, a future government will look, even if it doesn't benefit me, at the men and women who serve the people of Ontario and say that something has to be done, because we are working here.

I'm 61 years old. I'm going to retire with absolutely no pension from this place, other than the defined benefit—I can't even remember the name—anyway, the little pittance that is put in every month. It isn't even enough to pay for one year of salary, by the time I retire after 10 or 15 years of service. That's all it is. It is not a good pension.

I digress. I'm looking at what the federal government is saying. In the paper today, they are looking at targeting the federal civil servants' pensions. I have to question: A place like the House of Commons in Ottawa, if you want to know about a gold-plated pension, if you want to know about people who are getting a lot of money for their service, take a look at what the people are going to get.

They did identify some of those who were in the former Reform Party, which morphed itself into the Conservative Party of today, who were opposed to the pensions. Now they are eligible for \$120,000, \$130,000,

\$140,000 each. They're not backing down. I don't hear Chuck Strahl talking about taking away his pension. I don't hear Stephen Harper saying that the pension is too rich—he'd get \$140,000 or \$150,000 today. I don't hear any of those people who were there—Diane Ablonczy or any of them—saying that it's not good for them, but what they're saying is, it's not good for the people who paid into them.

What I'm saying, quite frankly, is that when people pay into a pension, when they have an expectation, they ought to get it. And what I want for me, I want for everyone in Ontario. What I think is fair for politicians, I think is fair for everyone, from the person who pushes a broom inside this building, who cleans the toilets, who works in the kitchen—I think that every single working Ontarian, every single Ontarian who is unable to work due to disability, is deserving of a pension.

I believe that we need to develop an employment-based pension for all working Ontarians so that those 65%, myself included, who don't have a pension, will have one at the time that they reach 65 or 70 years of age, when they're starting to think about their retirement, about their inability to work, about the inability to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning every day and work until seven or eight o'clock at night to make ends meet—and many, many do. We do.

Mr. Peter Shurman: We do.

Mr. Michael Prue: My colleague from Thornhill and I have found two agreements today.

We need to reward those people who are working in Ontario, and who are contributing, with a realistic pension at the end of their working lives. We need to deal with those 65% of Ontarians who presently have no workplace-based pension coverage.

We think that the Ontario retirement plan that we are proposing is a good one. We think that the band of income—that phrase—that the contribution rate would be assessed against would be different from the current CPP, so that the band of income would allow people who earn more money than the CPP will presently provide for to have a better pension.

We are suggesting that a higher benefit, a broader band of income, would allow for a higher benefit for plan members earning over \$47,000 a year. When you think about this, most Ontarians—not all—\$47,000 is what most Ontarians would earn, around that rate; some more, some less. But \$47,000 is not a huge amount of money. We think that the pension benefits should reflect that.

The old pension benefits from Canada reflected a much lower income from a much different era, which has long since come and gone. We think that a pension benefit based on the average income in Ontario of \$47,200, in 2010 dollars, is the right adequacy for today.

We think that the number of pension plans are too difficult; they're too widespread. There are some 6,500 workplace plans across the province of Ontario. Some are very successful. The teachers' appears to be very successful; the civil servants', in large part, federally and provincially, appear to be very successful. But you see a

whole bunch of the smaller plans that are not successful. You even see some of the big ones, like GM and Nortel and Stelco, that had to be bailed out. You see these plans are attempting to—they're failing. These plans are failing, and the governments are having to step in.

We think that the time has come to have the big dream of Leslie Frost. We all remember Leslie Frost—at least, some of us who are old enough. We remember, even it's only from a history book, the grand old man of Ontario. He proposed a pension plan for all Ontarians before the federal government enacted one. He was going down the road of having an Ontario pension plan for the people of Ontario, until such time as the Canada pension plan became greater than the gleam in the eye of some of the Liberals in Ottawa. He had this great dream, and he let it slip away—not unrealistically, because the Canada pension plan came in to take its place.

1610

But it's time to resurrect that dream. It's time to look to the people of Ontario and what they need and what the government can afford and what people are willing to pay in. We think it should be a voluntary plan. We want to make it available to all Ontarians. We want to have the security that when you go from one job to another job to another job, when one factory shuts down and you get a job working in the service sector, or you go from a job in the service sector to working in business or in some small business unit, your pension plan can go with you. We think that all of the past service should be allowed to be bought back. We believe that in order to maximize the participation, every employee not enrolled in a workplace pension plan would be automatically enrolled in the Ontario pension plan. If we do that—and I'm out of time—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm privileged and honoured to stand up and comment on the speech by the member from Beaches—East York.

I listened to his speech for quite some time, and it made sense, and I'm sure—the member referenced the federal government a lot. Of course, we're not going to follow the federal government recommendations. That's why we're introducing this bill in this House. Hopefully this bill, if passed, will create a protection mechanism for many different people who have worked hard in their life to save for their pension, to protect the people who are facing layoffs and to create some kind of flexibility and transparency and allow members who are pensioners to have access to some information about their pension. As we know, so many people in these days are worried about their future, especially when they lose a job. It will also create transparency to allow those people to live comfortably and be assured that the government will look after their pension and also make sure that transparency is in place and the pension plan will be administered very well for the safety of many people across the province of Ontario.

That's why our Premier, many different times, asked for a national strategy to create a pension plan for all

Ontarians, for all Canadians, because it's very important to allow people who worked hard in their life to live comfortably and know exactly that there's a government looking after them and that their future will be safe and protected.

I think our government is taking the right approach, and I think it's very important to continue in this direction to make sure all the pensioners in Ontario are looked after by a government and also make sure all the people who administer those plans have enough funds and the funds are overseen by the government of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Just in response to the member for Beaches-East York, I thought Mr. Prue was quite eloquent, and I wish him well. While I won't be voting NDP any time soon, in my lifetime, I certainly appreciate it, as one of all of us that doesn't have a pension. I gave up \$2.73 million. I was pensioned out at 42 years of age, so I would have had \$78,000 a year the rest of my life starting at 42; that was my 15th year. That's how gold-plated the old gold-plated pension plan was. If I live to be 73, that adds up to \$2.73 million.

Back home, they still think we all have pensions. The only time I was ever able to mention it publicly is when the teachers were acting up in the 1999 campaign. I remember there was a whole pile of them at the all-candidates' meeting in Collingwood lined up at the mike, monopolizing the mike and crapping on me. I finally got up and said, "I gave up \$2.73 million for the deficit. What have you done?" They sat down and they were very polite, and I've never heard from them since.

Having said that, my interest and my support of this government pension bill comes from—and I hope to get a chance to speak either later today or when it's next up for debate—my private member's resolution of June of last year in which I called upon the government to correct what had been an inadvertent mistake when we divested services from the province of Ontario or from, in my case, the paramedic services in Simcoe county from the Orillia hospital to the county of Simcoe. Overnight, their employers changed but they had to start over when they went into the OMERS pension plan. They couldn't bring their HOOPP or their OPSEU trust pension plans over, and that was very unfair. I had one paramedic who will retire soon—they're just starting to figure this out, even though the transfers were done years ago, as they're doing retirement planning—who will have two pension cheques. This act will make sure he can have one pension cheque, and a \$30,000-a-year difference. He earned that money, he contributed to it, and I thank the government for correcting what was an oversight of the past.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would just like to make comment on the speech by my colleague from Beaches-East York. It was quite well thought out and he did his homework on it. All I can say from my perspective is that the situation in the province is the way it is because the government

has failed to address the main problem, which is to beef up the present plan, the guaranteed benefits plan, which is there now. It's underfunded and has been for a long time.

A lot of the defined pension plans in North America have been under attack. The economy has played a part, the market has played a part, there's no doubt about that, but it's the lack of contributions—companies have been allowed to take sabbaticals from putting into the plans—that has got us in the state we're in.

If you look at most of the other situations throughout the country, the percentages of the plans, other than Ontario, are higher with the amount of money that is in the plans. The situation here is that a lot of these companies are not following through on their donations; they're folding up, they're leaving the country and they're leaving these plans floundering with nowhere to go.

Some of the things the government is bringing forward are—I would call it basically changes to governance, accountability. That's good, but they're not really addressing the financial end of it, and that's the main thing that people are facing today. They're afraid to lose their pension plans; they're afraid that they're going to be cut in a third, as witnessed by Nortel. Now the government is touting, "We're going to give them \$1,000," but some of those people are entitled to \$3,500 or \$4,000 a month. To work all your life and hear, "Okay, we're going to give you 25% of what you're entitled to" is not what I call a good thing. So they have to make drastic changes, and quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: What are pensions all about? Pensions are all about dignity, pensions are all about security and pensions are also all about being able to sleep at night.

If you take the text of any pension bill and you read it, you'll find that it's a really effective non-prescription sedative, but if you really want to lie awake all night worrying, then worry if this bill is not passed. Because what is this bill really all about? As the members of all three sides have said here today, this bill is about ensuring that private sector pensions can get combined, assets can get transferred and those people who are beneficiaries, who have paid into a pension all of their lives, when the time comes that they need the pension, (1) the pension will be there for them, and (2) the provisions governing the pension mean that it can't be raided, that the funds can be transferred from one plan to another and, as several of the speakers have pointed out, instead of having multiple smaller pension cheques, you can have one larger pension cheque.

When we've worked all of our lives and the time comes to hope that our savings have allowed us to live a retirement of comfort and dignity, it will be the work that the members in this House did here on this bill in the year 2010 that will determine what so many members of the baby-boom generation will look back at and say, "We

were well served by our government. We were well served by the members of all parties who stood up and voted for this bill and helped make a difference in our pension cheque to allow us to be able to live in comfort and in dignity and in security well into the 21st century.”

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Beaches–East York has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to my colleagues from London–Fanshawe, Simcoe–Grey, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Mississauga–Streetsville, and I thank them for the comments that they had to make.

1620

Quite frankly, when I stood up here and started to speak, I was trying to speak on behalf of a generation of people of which I am one, a generation of people who have come to expect that the government will look after them in their old age—a government who will do the necessary legal and political paperwork to ensure that pensions to which they have paid are paid out to them—a group of people who have worked hard to build and continue to build this society, who are hoping, in the end, to receive some of the fruits of the benefits to which they have contributed so handsomely over all of those years.

I listened to my friend from Simcoe–Grey, and although I acknowledge he is never likely to vote for my party, any more likely than I am ever likely to vote for his, the reality is that we both understand that the pension system is broken, and where it can be fixed, the government must take those necessary measures to fix it. But they have to look beyond that to the larger picture. We are going to have millions upon millions of people who are going to retire in the next 20 years. It is the biggest boom in the history of this country, and it is in fact absolutely unique to Canada. There is no baby boom in the United States of comparable amount. There is no baby boom of comparable amounts in Britain or anywhere else in Europe. We are uniquely positioned and we have to do something. I am imploring the members of this Legislature to look down to those 20 years and to start taking the necessary steps, of which this is one small, baby step, to make sure that pensions are there for everyone who has paid into them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I'm pleased to stand today and take a few minutes to join what appears to be a conversation about pensions as opposed to any kind of a debate, because I think there's a great deal of agreement amongst all of us here on the need for pensions, for pension planning, and the severity of the situation in the province and all across Canada, for that matter, when it comes to pensions and planning for our future.

I want to say that the member for Beaches–East York mentioned retirement at 55, and that you're six years beyond that magic number. Well, if we're into admitting things today, I've worked for 53 years; actually, some would say 36 because I've spent 16 years here. So I'm

approaching the 55 mark working, and I know exactly what you mean.

I come from a generation that I can remember, when I was young, when I was in my teens—my grandmother I think worked for a few years seasonally at a tobacco company in Leamington. My grandfather worked for many years for what was then Dominion Gas and eventually became Union Gas, but it was back in a time where company pensions weren't very prevalent. So what happened was, when it came time for my grandparents to retire, and they had then used what little money they probably had saved over the years, we moved in with my grandparents in order to care for them, partly because they had become frail, but the other part was that the family had to rally around in order that my grandparents could live in dignity.

As much as we wanted to do that—and there was never any hesitation that we didn't—I wouldn't advise it in this day under circumstances where a young family has to move in with their grandparents because, quite frankly, it changes your life and it changes your lifestyle.

That, again, is another reason for the importance of pensions—it has been mentioned here earlier today—so that we might live in dignity when we retire and that we might be able to certainly afford the necessities of life, but hopefully we would even be able to enjoy a few things beyond that.

When I say that I've been around this place for 16 years—I should say that when I arrived here, what some would call one of the conditions of employment was a pension plan. It was a pension that certainly wasn't quite as good as the ones that have been referred to that are received by our members of Parliament in Ottawa; it wasn't quite that good. Nevertheless, it was a pension plan that the taxpayers of Ontario and I contributed to. I thought that if I were fortunate enough to be in this place for any number of years, I would benefit from that pension plan.

One thing I might interject here about pension plans is that even for those who have pension plans, too many don't really understand what the plan is and what it's about.

Let me give you an example. The question always asked of me when we had a pension plan in this place was, “You only have to get elected to two terms and then you get one of those golden pensions.” That wasn't the case. It was a defined pension plan. Over 15 years at 5% a year, you would earn three quarters of your earnings as a pension. That plan wasn't vested until you had been here five years, but at that point it was only 25%.

My point is, if you were elected to two terms at that time, that would be roughly eight years, so you would get 40%, not a full pension. The two terms were so that it was vested. If you weren't elected for two terms, you then received from the pension plan the contributions you had made to it, and off you go.

Here I am into my 17th year here, and I, like my colleagues around, don't have a pension plan. It's a defined contribution to RRSPs. The taxpayers of Ontario

share in that contribution. We all know, of course, what has happened to RRSPs in the past year and a half. I'm one of those ones who's sticking around and keeping my investments, hoping that they will recover and that when either I've decided that it's time to retire or those folks back home decide it's time I retire, those RRSPs have built up a bit.

Of course, in the last year and a half, pension plans themselves, be they defined contribution, be they purchased or be they defined pension plans—what you receive from it—have all taken a hit because the whole idea behind pension contributions is that they will be invested and that, over time, historically, those pension plan investments made money. In fact, it was even referred to that, on some occasions, there was a contribution holiday not only by employers but in some cases by employees. In retrospect, I'm sure that those who were involved in that kind of decision are sorry that they did because the contributions that could have been made through those years when they were given the holiday from contribution—that decision has come back to bite us.

What I'm trying to get at by describing what the situation was like with my grandparents is not unlike the situation with a lot of people today across Canada and Ontario who don't have a pension plan of any kind. Those who, of course, work have the Canada pension plan, but there's some question from time to time of whether it's properly funded. There's also, I think, the bigger question: Is the benefit that you receive from the Canada pension plan going to keep you comfortable and with dignity in your retirement?

1630

So pensions are something that you don't think about a lot when you're young because—like life—you're going to live forever. But as time goes on, they certainly become more important. I think there comes a time when you need to understand what your pension plan is; what the details of your pension plan are. Like we always say, it's what's in the small print that really counts.

I know—unfortunately, through having to deal with some situations down our way, down the Essex-Windsor way where manufacturing has taken a particularly hard hit over the last year and a half—why there are some who are now coming to us and saying, “Well, I took a buyout and a reduced pension,” but now the company has encountered some trouble, or the pension plan itself has encountered some trouble, and there's some question as to whether they're actually going to continue to receive the pension that they thought they were going to receive over the rest of their lives. That, I think, along with losing your job, has to be one of the more devastating points in one's life. If you were fortunate enough to be employed all your working life, that's one thing, but then to find out that your pension is not going to be what you thought it was going to be—and what, frankly, at a certain point in time was promised to you—why, that's got to be very devastating. That's what we're trying to start to deal with in this bill. The Minister of Finance, the

Honourable Dwight Duncan, has said that there will be a second pension bill that will come along and that we will try to address some of the concerns that we're all experiencing today.

Now, it's one thing to identify the problem and another thing to get everyone concentrating on what that problem is, but my concern is that pensions in Ontario and in Canada are in such a state today that the recovery, bringing these pension plans up to date, is going to be a huge task that we're all going to have to share in. As was mentioned in some of the earlier debate, the—which generation is it? The next generation is Generation X, so the boomers are coming along to retirement age now. It's going to have a huge effect, not just on pensions in Ontario but on our health care system as well. So we can't take the issue of pensions by itself and say, “Well, we'd like to correct that. Here's how we're going to do it, and here's what it's going to cost.” We also have to at least acknowledge some of the other costs that are going to be involved in our society.

Interjection.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: It's just being said next to me here: I can hear that it's the young guys. It's the London-Fanshaws, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Development, Ms. Papatello and some of the others over there. You're the ones—the member for Ottawa Centre and the member for Kitchener-Conestoga—the young ones, who are going to have to deal with these issues as our population ages. It's no mean task, believe me. It was described earlier as the bubble going up, and there are going to be fewer people at the bottom to provide the services and for the needs of that.

So from a social point of view, we have a lot of work to do, and the sooner we start that, get at it and try to resolve some of these problems, the better off we'll be. My advice to anybody out there today, whether you have a pension or whether you don't, is to consider what your employment future is and what your retirement future is and to begin thinking about it early.

I would even suggest that it's good to say, “Well, what if? What if it doesn't work out exactly the way I see it today? What if some of these issues become problems?” I would also recommend that you do your very best to plan a little on the side as well, because this idea of retirement and the idea of pensions in your retirement is a very, very complex issue.

We're dealing today with the first of two bills, we're told. It's often referred to that the size of a bill is the number of pages it has, but this has 45 pages—and these are just amendments to the Pension Benefits Act itself. So you can see that it's a very complex issue and that the steps we take today are going to have their effect down the road. We can look back and say what we should have done—this is a term I use sometimes because I happen to be a pilot, and my pilot friend will appreciate this: The runway behind you is of no value whatsoever. It's only the runway ahead that counts.

Interjection.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Oh, the member for Timmins—James Bay is a flyer. He probably flies more than any of us in here.

Interjection.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: He's still flying?

But anyway, my point is this: It doesn't matter what it is we have or have not done in the past, whether we've prepared adequately in the past or whether we have not; it's the runway ahead that we have to be concerned about. It's looking ahead that we have to be concerned about.

One of the initiatives that we here in Ontario are taking is to try to get together with the finance ministers across Canada and the federal finance minister to take a serious look at pensions and what the needs of our citizens are—because we are going to have to do that kind of planning today in order to provide for the future. It has been mentioned by my friend that you can't do this in isolation. It's something that's going to affect all of us.

That's my advice to those who have pensions, those who do not and even those who have some savings: You have to be careful where you put those savings, take the best advice you can and, to some extent, take responsibility yourself. Don't always rely on someone else to provide that for you. We're going to try to plan as best we can, we're going to try to protect the citizens of Ontario as best we can, but there's always that chance that it might not work exactly the way we want it to.

I know that there's the energy and there's the desire by every member in this Legislature to protect the employees, the working people of the province of Ontario, to protect the money that they've set aside for their retirement. I know that by working together, we'll be able to do that—

Mr. Peter Shurman: If I had your money, I'd burn my own.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Yes, yes; I'm sure you would. It's really too bad that the folks who do happen to watch this can't hear all the interjections, because every once in a while, there's a good one.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Not often enough.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade says, "Not often enough."

That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I thought that was a good set of remarks from the honourable member from Essex. If I had the member for Essex's money and the member for Thornhill's money, I would certainly burn mine, and—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm sure the people at home, with us all moaning about our financial woes, don't believe a word we're saying about any of it.

1640

I'm not going to get a chance to speak today, because there are others in the rotation ahead of me. This bill's section 80.1 does respond to my private member's resolution of June 4, 2009.

Originally, I thought there were 30 paramedics in the county of Simcoe that—somehow we didn't transfer their pensions properly when we changed their employers from, in a couple of cases, the Orillia hospital. The new employer became the county of Simcoe. There were a number of transfers like that. "Downloading," I think, is what people have called it in parties other than my own.

Then I started to hear from Frontenac county, where 100 paramedics have been ripped off their pensions because inadvertently—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Peterborough—the member for Peterborough mentions Hastings; Quinte; Prince Edward county—110 paramedics. And this is just paramedics. Leeds—Grenville, 60; Dufferin county, 20; Grey county, 28. This bill will bring some fairness back, and properly transfer the pensions if they wish to do so.

I thought it was just paramedics. Then I find out it's community care access workers. Then I find out, from a letter from OMERS in response to my private member's resolution, that there were thousands of people affected. In fact, the expert pension commission that the Liberal government set up—I'll read the quote when I do get my 20 minutes, probably another day. Up to 10,000 people are affected.

So, good for the government to correct the sins of the past, and I hope members will support this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to say I appreciate the comments that were made by the member opposite. I know him to be an honourable, hard-working member and I don't want to in any way impugn motive, because not only would that be against the standing orders, it's just not the way I am.

The issue, to me, is: Is this terrible, what you're doing? Absolutely not. It is a step in the right direction. But is it dealing with what the problem is? The problem is, there's a huge percentage of people in this province who don't have pensions. And you know what? At the end of this legislation, they're still not going to have pensions. That, to me, is the issue.

Yes, we need to do things in order to try to protect those who were lucky enough to have pensions by doing some of the things in this legislation. But we need to find a way to challenge ourselves, as all members of this House, from all sides, to basically look at what can be done in order to allow people, after a reasonable amount of time at work, to retire with some dignity.

You see in it your constituency, as I do. How many people come into your constituency office who are now retired, who are living on very little income, because they worked hard all their lives, wherever they were, but they happened to be unlucky enough not to have a pension plan at the employment that they had all those years. They retired on what little income they'd put away, and probably the equity in their house. If they're lucky, they've got no debt. But really, all they've got for income is Canada pension and the old age pension. When you

add those two things together, they're lucky if they're retiring at somewhere around \$1,600, \$1,700 a month.

It's pretty difficult to make ends meet, even if the mortgage is paid, when you're trying to pay the utilities and the cost of your house—you have to have a vehicle in many communities that we live in—buy groceries and do the things that you need to do just to keep yourself afloat.

I think we need to challenge ourselves, and that's why Andrea Horwath has put forward the idea of an Ontario pension plan. I think this is a useful debate, but I think we need to challenge ourselves to do something that is much more substantial for those people who don't have pensions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to make some comments in regard to what was stated by my colleague and good friend from Essex, Mr. Crozier.

This issue of pensions: Some are more wealthy and have greater benefits than others, and have been about for a long, long time. My grandfather—commenting on grandparents, as the member for Essex did—worked for the New York Central Railroad here in Canada. They had a line here; many lines. It later became the Michigan Central and then the Penn Central. That was American-owned but they had a presence here in Ontario and they had a pension plan that was probably adequate at the time.

My grandfather passed away in 1944 at the age of 64. He was relatively young. There was a provision within that particular pension that my grandmother would get survivor benefits. I don't know how great they were, but I suspect, as a percentage of his gross pay it was reasonable in those days. I'm sure that someone in New York was really wondering about this, sending his cheque to Canada time and time again, the survivor benefit, because my grandmother lived to be 99, and her husband had passed away in 1944. They really did probably have the auditors look at that once in a while.

We need to, through this bill, provide for the restructuring of pension plans that are affected by corporate reorganization. There has been much of that here in Ontario, and indeed around the world. We need to look at the United States. We see restructuring happening there throughout all sectors of their economy, so we're not immune from that here in Ontario.

This bill will go a long way to assist folks with their pensions, to give clarity and transparency and give regulatory oversight to ensure that their pensions are safe.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments and questions?

Mr. John O'Toole: I do want to compliment the member from Essex, because just by listening to it out in the lobby I could tell, and I know from his past, he knows of what he speaks, and I commend him for that—his very general comments, but also quite reflective of the kind of person I know him to be.

I liked his catch-phrase of “Look ahead, young man,” because it really is a good starting gate for people in the workforce today. The changes in work that we're seeing are evidence that a career might only last 10 years, and you may have to change for various reasons. That's the future. I agree some of the literature, not just by Richard Florida but others, of the changing nature of work itself is very important.

But to put on the record a couple of things that I think are important, if you look at what we think of as the federal plan, it has three parts to it: the OAS part—old age security—and we have the GIS, the guaranteed income supplement, and then you have the CPP.

Now, that basically is not enough to sustain yourself, so 38% of the population today, in one form or another, public or private, has a pension that we're referring to here—maybe less than that as we go forward. What the big issue here is—and he gave credit to the federal government for taking a role here, and others had mentioned it—to roll it into some kind of an engaged CPP. But that's deferred income for the government. Do you understand? If they're going to give you tax relief to shelter income, then they are going to get less revenue. But in the long term they will have less expenditures where they're going to have to increase these other support plans that I talked about, the three plans.

Employers themselves, in fairness, are going to work in jurisdictions where they assume less liability over the long term—not that I think they should or shouldn't, because all the pensions are invested in those companies. They're shares in equities and bonds. So they have to be healthy environments for investment, and this—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. The member from Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the members for Simcoe–Grey, Timmins–James Bay, Chatham–Kent–Essex and Durham for their comments.

I agree, and in fact I think the member for Durham and the member for Simcoe–Grey were kind of hitting on the same issue, when the member for Durham says that in your lifetime these days, under these circumstances, you may work for two or three or four employers. So as the member for Simcoe–Grey has brought up, portability, I agree, is important. We should address that and make portability among pension plans a very high priority.

The need for a pension for everybody: I agree with the member for Timmins–James Bay. Less than 40% of the people in the province of Ontario, and I suppose the same statistic for Canada, have a pension plan. So it's that other 60% to 70% who are sitting there saying, “What about me, and where did I get left off?”

That leads me to just point out that, along with all the other social issues that we have to deal with, obviously the costs, in the end, have to be borne by us, by people—by people working, as a matter of fact, because the money just doesn't come off the trees.

So we've defined some of the problem, and I don't disagree with any of my colleagues, but it's going to be a

huge effort on our part—and, I think, some of those who follow us—to resolve some of these issues.

1650

The bottom line is that we all agree that everybody in this province and in this country deserves to live out their life in dignity, and we all are working to see that that's done.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today and add my voice to what my friend from Essex called, quite correctly, a conversation. This is probably right up there with the most civilized debate that I've participated in since I've been here, because it seems that, on some level, people who are joining in this debate, and the comments and questions afterwards, are all, to some greater or lesser degree, on the same page. I think there's a consensus here that says we need pension reform in the province of Ontario.

I think it's unfortunate that we're not dealing with the whole piece yet, because as I recall, the finance minister has said that this would be one of two bills. So what Bill 236 does is address some issues pertaining to pension plans that exist, but it doesn't talk about what happens for the rest of us—and the rest of us, in this particular case, are the many, as opposed to the few.

I go back a little while—I get into these stories every once in a while that sound like “when I was a boy,” but in this Legislature, a lot of us tell those stories because a lot of us have some years to look back on. I hope some of that experience rubs off on some of the younger people who are watching us today.

My first job that involved a pension plan goes back about 45, 46 years. At the time, as a young man, barely more than a boy, I remember that there was a deduction on my pay slip that said I had contributed to a pension. I was told that in some esoteric, abstract way my employer had also contributed to that pension. It wasn't abstract; it was real. But when you're 18 or 19, you don't think of what might happen when you're 65, which was the mandatory retirement age at that time.

If you joined, as I did at the time, Bell Canada or a company like that, pensions were just a part of the plan. Forget about what they might mean when you reach that age. Forget about whether or not they would cover your needs at that point in time. They existed, and they existed in companies of that stature and still do today.

I had pensions in the first couple of jobs that I had. They were known as registered pension funds. Ultimately, when I went into business for myself, I had to transfer those funds out as registered retirement pension funds, which were locked in and still exist on my behalf today. I assure every member of this Legislature—every one of you, I'm sure, is capable of relating to what I'm going to say—that they will be insufficient to supply me the style of retirement that would be even a remote match with the style of life that I've been fortunate enough to lead.

I look back, by way of comparison, to my dad. My late dad was in the insurance business. He worked for a

company that still exists today, called Empire Life. He had a pension and collected the pension when he came of age. As I recall, it was probably in the vicinity of \$200 a month. Even then, what was that going to do?

I think, in a very real way, those stories are related to what we're talking about now, and that is the supply of sufficient funds for us to live in some dignified way when we get to a point where we can no longer work or where we no longer wish to work.

Again, to talk to the people who are probably paying the most attention to what I have to say today, what we all have to say today, if you're young or if you can appeal to people who you love or you care about who are young, the words that you want to say are, “You will not be 20 forever.” The 50-, 60-, 70-year time frame will come very quickly, and so the time to save isn't 30 years from now. That's what pensions are about. If I had known that then, I'd be much better off today. I'm not complaining, but there are things that you have to know when you're young that you don't want to listen to when you're young, and those can be lessons coming out of a debate like this.

Let me make a couple of comments about pensions in general and Bill 236 in particular. Most Ontarians, and we've heard it previously—about two thirds—do not have any pension at all. They just don't have a pension. I happen to be one of them. I think many people in this Legislature are amongst them. Most people believe, as my colleague said earlier, that we have pensions, and not only do we have pensions if we're members of this Legislature, but we have whopping, big pensions. We don't. People are surprised to discover that we don't, and I'll have a little bit more to say about that shortly, but the fact is, MPPs' pensions aside, most Ontarians just plain don't have pensions, period.

Why? The answer is that small business, something that all of us like to call the engine of the economy and the largest employer, collectively, in the province, doesn't have the wherewithal to provide for people in the style that they might like to. I owned and operated a small business for about 15 years. You talk a good game on small business, but the truth is that in the overall scheme of things, nobody much gives a damn about small business in terms of allowing them the latitude to do those kinds of things.

In the Ontario that we live in today, the costs pile on to small business, restricting their ability to even make a profit much less provide a pension plan for their employees. Examples in the today world: WSIB for construction, which we've just gone through, and who knows what yet to come; the Smoke Free Ontario Act and its impact on retailers while you don't close illegal smoke shacks. That has an effect of robbing them of revenue and robbing Ontario of taxes and robbing young people of their health. These are things that are being faced by small businesses today: general red tape and, oh yes, the taxes.

So we, the two thirds of Ontarians without pensions, pay for pension bailouts but we get no benefit except that

the recipients don't have to go on welfare because we've paid for the benefits in advance, rather than pay for the welfare. We are, in effect, taxpayers who are providing for bailouts, but we're the taxpayers paying for people to have pensions while we don't have them ourselves. It's a bit of a Catch-22 in terms of how we operate.

I paid, we all paid, for the General Motors bailout, about \$4 billion as I recall, and basically all of that was used to top up pensions for General Motors workers whose contract had actually, by the time we got to it, eliminated any need for them to pay into the pension plan at all. How strange is that? I don't have a pension and I helped bail out people who do have a pension, and now I'm here to talk about a bill that adjusts pensions to make them more equitable for the some 30% of people who have pensions that I don't have access to. That's a little strange.

Nortel workers were out in the cold until you realized that you might lose a by-election in Ottawa West-Nepean. So you took the money and you fixed the pensions. Let's be honest about it. You weren't talking about those until that point in time.

This is not just my tax money; it's your tax money, it's all of our tax money that we're using to bail people out. I'm not saying that the Nortel workers don't deserve some consideration. I'm saying that there is nobody out there who is going to bail me out—with my own tax money or anybody else's. So when do we get a bailout? That is what we haven't covered in Bill 236. And let's not call it a bailout. When do we start to participate in something that provides a degree of equity for all people in the province of Ontario?

I have RSPs. I paid into them diligently, and the question that I have to ask myself is, are they enough? We have to get real. The answer is absolutely not. We all know the answer. We're creating, in effect, with the system that we have, a new class of people, and I will call them the retired poor. We have an aging population. Bill 236 will fix pensions, but the bill only fixes pension plans that exist and it fixes them with dollars, I say again, belonging to those who are members of the biggest pension plan of all, which I will call the "go it alone" plan. That's the one that I'm a member of.

So I have a problem with discussing Bill 236 in isolation. While, in essence, I don't think I have too much problem with Bill 236—we can talk technically about it in a few moments—it is only a piece of a very large puzzle, and that's the sense that I'm getting from the debate in the Legislature today.

1700

I just came back from touring the province with a couple of my colleagues from all sides of the House during pre-budgetary submissions. We had a chance to hear from a number of groups, not least public sector unions. I want to put this on the record, because there was reference made by the likes of CUPE, OPSEU, ETFO and others about their entitlements, their collective agreements and, very particularly, their benefits—their pension plans—amongst other things.

My very favourite was ETFO, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, and its unsmiling president, Sam Hammond. I had a chance to question him personally, and I regretted later that I didn't actually jump over the desk, grab him by the lapels and say, "What is wrong with you? What you are thinking?" He said, "You can't touch our entitlements. You can't go near us. We're inviolate. It doesn't matter what's happened from an economic point of view." I accept that fact, but he has to accept, and the public sector unions have to accept, that they are in a very unique position. They're the only ones who haven't been affected. Even private sector pension plans have been affected detrimentally, and we've seen the results of that by the economic recession, but the public sector pension plans not so.

So I generally have to make the comment, because we've seen it in those hearings and we've seen it across the board, that we're dealing with anything but a level playing field here. That's why when we talk about this bill—a bill that looks to address existing problems with existing pension plans—that it simply isn't enough.

So here's my first bottom line: The bill, in and of itself, is a reasonable attempt to adjust existing pension plans. But how do you adjust pension legislation for greater fairness while allowing people—like the two thirds, like most of you, like me—to foot the bill? Because right now, the offer that's on the table for us is basically nothing.

I mentioned MPP pensions, and I want to put this on the record: We don't have them, and colleagues have alluded to that fact. We used to, but not any more. The previous government—let's not discuss what party—thought we didn't need pensions. Wrong; we did need pensions, and I'm the first person to say it. Everybody needs pensions, however they are created.

British Columbia, as many of you—I dare say all of you—know, has addressed this problem for their MPPs by doing something that I will admit for any government must be pretty difficult: to turn around to the population in these times and say, "You know what? MPPs are like anybody else. They need pensions. We're changing the situation, and British Columbia is restoring pensions," something that we should be doing here. You can quote me.

Normally, when a bill is debated—I speak for myself on this one, I have to say, Speaker—MPPs stand up and talk about what's in the bill. What I've been talking about for the most part is what's not in this bill, and I think that that's the biggest single aspect of this bill that jumps out at me. First and foremost, what's not in the bill; secondly, that this bill is completely irrelevant to the two thirds of people in Ontario who don't have pensions.

To my first point: They didn't listen or act on the Arthurs report. Time and money was expended, and the question is, for what? This is typical—no plan, no solution. This bill does not address the following:

What happens to the pension benefits of bankrupt employers? It doesn't fix the problem that the Nortel

retirees found themselves in or find themselves in today. It took a by-election in Ottawa to fix that. The only hope, then, for retired pensioners of bankrupt companies is if their MPP resigns and a by-election that Dalton McGuinty cares to win is held. That's when we'll have pension reform for those people. That's not the way you do it. You do it by changing it legislatively, and this bill doesn't go far enough.

There are elements of this bill that are worth alluding to. We talk, for example, about grow-in benefits, which some people say are a good idea. The province of Nova Scotia is one; most other provinces do not. In a commentary by a legal firm that specializes in pensions—and I'll read this into the record: The bill proposes to extend grow-in benefits to all members who are involuntarily terminated by an employer, other than for cause, on and after January 1, 2012. "Jointly sponsored pension plans and multi-employer pension plans may elect to opt out of this requirement.

"This proposed change is part of a general initiative in the bill to treat plan members uniformly regardless of the circumstances of their termination.... Such consistency is a worthwhile goal, since it makes little policy sense to provide this benefit to employees terminated in a special situation"—like a plant shutdown or reorganization—"but not those terminated in the normal course." Then, in bold type, it says, "But consistency of treatment among plan members could also have been achieved by abolishing mandatory grow-in rights."

Grow-in rights have to do with benefits that might have accrued to somebody who had stayed in a situation that is no longer available to him or her. Now, if you want to talk about abstract, that's pretty abstract.

What it basically says is, at the time that a pension plan folds, full or partial windup, if your age plus your years of service total 55, you have the right to grow into the pension plan and receive benefits as if you had continued to contribute. So it's pretty strange stuff to be considering, even verbalizing it. I'm trying very hard still to understand it, and for people at home, what does it mean?

The point that I'm trying to make here is that the bill has a number of technical aspects to it, but it doesn't really get close to the real question, and the real question is: What are we going to do about all of Ontario over the fullness of time?

The 60% of Ontarians who don't have pensions and who are solely responsible for providing for their own retirements have worked very hard, have worked diligently, have worked prudently to provide for their futures, and all they hear from the government is that we all need to tighten our belts, and all we see from this government on a go-forward basis is waste.

I want to talk for a moment about people who did do what they had to do to provide for their own retirements—not the people like me who are still working, who are 62, who have some investments and are relying on the market to return sufficiently so that those investments will yield a reasonable retirement 10, 15 or

20 years down the road—or 30, if we live that long, and some of us are; let's talk about the people who are today 10 years older than I—72, 73, 74, 75, who had retired—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Shurman: There's somebody over there—who had retired, who had the investments, whose investments were yielding the style that they wanted to live in, to be able to pursue their leisure, their pastimes in whatever way they wanted, and then got hit over the course of the past year because they were individuals with a variety of things, not the least, a great big recession. Now, that recession hit me, too, in terms of my investments, but I'm not drawing on those investments, so I have a chance or I've had a chance to have the investments recover. So I have a future to look forward to, in terms of my ability to draw on them, that that 72- or 75-year-old doesn't, because he or she got hit and continued to need that money to draw down. That's a very major problem, and there's no fallback position for those people.

That's what we're talking about. We're talking about people who have been hit very, very hard. This bill only adds to that anxiety. Compare the amount of time that the Liberal government will be devoting to this bill to the amount of time given to the HST bill that will absolutely impact each and every person in this province. I raise the HST again by way of saying that people who have been hit very hard over the course of the past year, who are living on investment income that has been necessarily reduced over the course of that time period, are being hit again by—what was it we heard the other day?—\$225 average per household per annum just for heating.

It's really difficult for each of us to go to the constituency office, and I would say the government members at the very least have got to admit that when you get into the constituency office and you hear about these problems, you've got to take some level of responsibility, and when you want to talk about pensions, you have to be ready to address these things on a go-forward basis.

We're all getting older. Society in general is getting older. We need pension reform, nobody argues with that. This bill is a reasonable bill—nobody argues with that—but it doesn't do anything near addressing the fullness of the question. I hope that over the course of this debate one conclusion will be reached, and that is that we have to do much, much more.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I'm in agreement with what was said by the honourable member, because although this bill does address some of the issues and deals with some of the concerns with regard to those people who have pensions, it does little to nothing to deal with the issues of people who don't have pensions. That's the majority of Ontarians. I think most people in this debate are agreeing on that.

I'm going to get a chance in a few minutes to debate this in fuller detail. There are things in this bill that deal

with everything from vesting to the rules about how the pension administration system should work. Some are a step in the right direction. Does it go as far as I'd want? Probably not, but I'll get a better chance to debate that later.

I just want to echo in on the point that the honourable member makes, and that is: The real challenge that we have is how we are able to make sure, especially in this current economy and the economy that's going to develop as we move forward, that we give people an opportunity to have a pension after 30 or 40 years of work. There used to be a time, when I first started working, when you went knocking at the door of the local employer, whoever that might be, and you got a job for life. That was the case in Windsor. That was the case in Oshawa. Certainly it was the case in Timmins. Those places had defined pension plans. Some of them may not have been very rich—unfortunately, the one I worked for was very meagre—but most people had defined pension plans. So there was a certain understanding; there was a covenant that, if you went to work for the employer and you committed to long service, at the end of the day you'd never get rich but you'd be taken care of. You would have benefits. You would have wages in the time that you worked, and in the time after you retired you would have some form of pension plan.

Well, that has all been turned on its ear. I think the too-big-to-fail debate that we had two years ago and last year proves the point that nothing is safe out there. Who would have thought 20 years ago that Nortel pensions would be in question of being insolvent? So we need to do something to allow people who work every day in this province to have a pension when they retire, and I'll speak to that a little bit later.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Questions and comments? The member from Ancaster—

Interjection: It's a long one.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: The riding with the longest name, because our people have the biggest hearts and the biggest hopes, Madam Speaker.

I just want to compliment the member from Thornhill for his excellent remarks. I thought they were timely, balanced and fair. He—

Interjection: Not all of them.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Well, most of them were. He went to some length to, I think, prudently describe the current lay of the land and to make some helpful suggestions.

In that context—and I don't profess to be a pension expert, although in my previous role as Minister of Government Services I did have some engagement with some of our employee pensions, which are very good, by the way; just as an aside. But pensions are basically about security, and a lack of a pension or a lack of security in one's older years is not a pleasant situation or prospect.

I know there has been talk at the federal level about Canada pension plan supplemental plans, individual plans. Perhaps it could be created. There has also been some talk about portability, and I note my colleague's comments that pension reform in isolation certainly doesn't enhance portability. Portability would have to be national, which of course is why we're not only moving on aspects of the Arthurs report with this bill but why the Premier has talked repeatedly about the need for a comprehensive federal-provincial discussion about this. Portability requires—I'd suspect that people would be vested right from the get-go. That's another aspect that we need so that that fund can continue to be built regardless of the number of jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Simcoe—Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I think our honourable colleague from Thornhill did an excellent job. He focused, really, on those people who don't have pensions, like himself, myself and many members of this House.

Ourselves aside, we are going to have to do something, and the NDP has picked up on a good issue that I know strikes the hearts of many Ontarians. Whether their approach in terms of an Ontario pension plan is the right way to go—I say to the government, you have to accelerate your conversation with the federal government. If you don't want to adopt something like an Ontario pension plan, Mr. McMeekin, the parliamentary assistant, just talked about an enhancement, perhaps at the national level, to the Canada pension plan.

We are in serious doo-doo with respect to people who are 55-plus now, who will retire in the next few years and who have no pensions. The economy won't recover that quickly. There won't be jobs for those people while they're still in their working years and still have good health, so government, collectively, we're going to have to do something or at least get on the right track. This issue has been ignored for far, far too long. When the honourable member from Thornhill said that this bill is nice and it corrects a number of technical issues that have been outstanding for many years, he also said that it doesn't address the fullness of the question, and the question, of course, is, what are we going to do? And we'd better start doing it sooner.

I don't buy the government—I get really worried when McGuinty uses the federal government as a crutch or an excuse not to do something. You've been in long enough that most Ontarians can read through your coat. If you don't want to do something, you blame the federal government. We had this silly motion about the federal government's budget that was voted on this morning—debate collapsed yesterday because the government couldn't get enough speakers to talk about their own motion—but that was another smokescreen to divert attention from the real issues. The real issues today are jobs, job security and, of course, pensions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Thornhill gave a very definite survey of the landscape in terms of the

pension issues from his perspective and from the broader perspective. I think the most important comment is that when he's talking about people's preparedness for quite a different future, it's a good warning sign for all of us. This bill is part of the two parts of pension legislation that have been promised by the McGuinty government. This part is more or less tinkering, as has been said by a few, but it's important. Also, the second part, working with the federal government, will bring some of these portability and stability issues forward.

I hope the two levels of government are able to work collectively and co-operatively, because when you start messing around with the Income Tax Act itself under the CPP rules—I really do believe that the province's rate is usually set as a percentage of the federal rate. It's an important place to begin because there will be revenue implications in the short term.

I think it's important also for the individual to shoulder some of the responsibility, and that could be done through income tax as well, through tax provisions, to patriate some of the dollars of income into sort of mandatory—if that's not too strong of a word—retirement planning.

I think having transparency in all of the changes that are made—the predictability of the market itself becomes the real question. I don't know if anyone really knows what the market will be in two months, let alone two years or 20 years. That's fundamental to all of this planning and tinkering: What is the future of the global economy and the monetary system as we know it today? That's fundamental to all of this. Otherwise—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Thornhill has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you to my colleagues from Timmins-James Bay, Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale, Simcoe-Grey and Durham for their comments. The comments actually lead me to conclude the way I started: Saying that there was a fair amount of collegiality on this certainly is holding true. There are ideas coming from all sides, because at the end of the day, this Legislature is about nothing if not the security of Ontarians today and on a go-forward basis, security and dignity in being able to live out our lives having the appropriate chronic care facilities and the appropriate health care. And the appropriate means with which to live in that dignified way has everything to do with how we deal with the question of pensions in this province. This is ultimately about coping, because we are becoming, at least for the next 50 years or so, a seniors' society.

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I want to put a couple of things on the record with respect to the HST and its impact on seniors at this time because it impacts on retired persons' abilities to go forward with dignity as well. Our research is estimating that the average senior couple could expect to pay approximately \$2,762 more per annum due to the HST on costs associated with daily activities, recreation and their savings. That's a very, very big deal.

We've had a lot to say in this Legislature on all sides with regard to the HST. It does come into effect on July 1. It does impact seniors in that way. In so doing, it does deplete the savings and, where possible, the pension income of those very same seniors, and we have to be cognizant of it.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons, CARP, has conducted a survey of its members, and 69% of them believe that the extra costs caused by the HST will be offset by the government's so-called tax cuts. I don't believe it will, and that's a big deal.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to say I'm glad to be able to participate in this debate, although just 20 minutes' time is allocated, but there are the rules. Live and die by the rules, as they might say.

I just want to say up front that this is an interesting debate in the sense that we're trying to deal with what is a real problem in our society. There are all kinds of people, some 60% to 70% of citizens who work hard every day, who go to work in the morning, who toil every day at their job and come home at night, who are without a pension when they come home at the end of the day. They can do that for 30 or 40 years and have nothing to show for it pension-wise after 30 or 40 years of work. That is a real travesty in a society such as Ontario and in an economy such as ours and in a society that counts itself as something progressive.

The question becomes, why is that? Why have we not moved towards dealing with making sure that we have adequate pensions? Well, I'll tell you what. We can point fingers at each other in this Legislature, but I think in society we can probably point fingers as well.

For example, when I was working at the McIntyre mine for Noranda, I remember going to bargaining committee. One of the things that I wanted to do in bargaining was to put pension front and centre in order to increase the amount of pension that people would get on retirement, because we did have a defined pension plan. But my own members would say, "Oh, my God, no. Give me my money now. Don't give me my money 20 years from now because what I need now, I need now." So they would give their bargain committees instructions not to put too much emphasis on the pension and to put money up front in the collective agreement. I always thought that was very, very short-sighted on the part of workers because I understood, like most people, that people do not plan for retirement.

I remember my mother, who passed away a year and a half ago, God rest her soul, told me when I first started working my very first job, "Gilles, I'll give you a piece of advice, and you're not going to listen because I didn't listen to my mother. If you took 10% of your income from today, and you put it aside and you basically learned how to live on 90% of what you make, you're going to be able to retire a very comfortable person at age 50." She said, "I know you're not going to listen, but that's what you need to do." I remember thinking back

then, when I was a young guy in my teens, "Is she nuts? I've got all my life to build a pension. I'm not going to think about that today." Well, God, was mother right! Madeleine Bisson, God rest her soul, figured it out when I was a kid, far, far sooner than I did.

The reality is, we never start to think about pensions until when? Until you're five or 10 years away from retirement. That's when people start thinking about pensions.

This is how they start to think about it: "Oh, I'm 50 some-odd years old. Hmm, retirement is not that far away; I'll be 65 in 10 years"—or eight years or whatever. "Oh, boy, I'm really looking forward to that retirement date. Maybe I can do it earlier." Then they start to do the math, and they say, "Well, the house is paid, and I don't have much in the way of debt. If I really hunker down, I'll be able pay off that debt in a few years and I'll be in a position to retire." Then they go, "Well, I don't have a defined pension plan, so I have to live on Canada pension at age 60, so I have to take a reduction in my Canada pension." Then you do the math on that, and you say, "I'm entitled to the full amount of the Canada pension," which is about \$900. Take the deduction that you take at age 60, and you're somewhere around \$600. You go, "I'm going live on \$600 for the next five years until age 65?" Who in this House and who in this society is able to do that?

So then you say, "Well, maybe what I can do is, if I had an RSP or something, I would be able to make ends meet." But the reality is that far too few people in our society—and not because they're not well-intended—plan for retirement and don't put that money away. Yes, there are opportunities to put RSPs away in regards to saving for retirement, and there are some very good rules about being able to get some tax help in doing that, but how many people actually do that? I would ask, how many people in this Legislature give above what we get in RSPs for our pensions in this House? I bet you it's less than 80%. I would bet you: There are more people in this House who don't put away money for their retirement than there are who do, and we're no different than anybody in our society.

The problem is that we're all very busy in our lives doing what we're doing. So when you're younger, you say, "Boy, if I only could save up the down payment for the house." Then you finally buy the house and you say, "If I could only pay down the mortgage." Then your kids get to college and university level, and you say, "God, if only I could give my kids what I didn't get and put them through university or college with no debt." You finally get that through, and all of a sudden they're getting married, and you say, "If only I could help them out with a nice wedding," and after that, they're buying their first house. And then you've got grandchildren. You know, it's life. So the reality is that we don't take care of our retirement.

So the question becomes, what should we be doing? I'm going to say this—and I know I'm going get some mail and emails on this: What can we do to protect

ourselves from ourselves—if you follow what I mean. I think that's where the issue of defined pensions is really, really important.

There are a couple of approaches, and I favour what Andrea Horwath, our leader, has brought forward, because I think it's a fair compromise. There are those in our society who say that we should mandate that all workers in Ontario have a defined pension plan, and that there be vehicles created for employees to have pension plans that are portable from employer to employer, so that if you work for contractor A for six months, employer B for three years, and then you go work wherever, you would bring your pension with you. It would be a defined pension plan, where your employer and you are both paying into your pension plan. There are those who favour that. However, that's difficult to do. When you go from having 70% of people with no pensions to that, it's a huge step. Many people in the employer community—and, I would argue, many workers—would have a problem with that. Many employees would say, "What do you mean? You're going to take how much from my paycheque every month? No. Get away from me." Employers would be complaining as well.

Or you could have RSP-based pensions of some type. Well, let me ask how many people in this House like RRSPs; put up your hands, please. GICs? I don't see too many hands going up. Because, like everybody in our society, in North America and Europe, we took a whack on our investments. We saw a devaluation of anywhere from 30% to 50%, depending on what you were invested in, when there was a market correction. Have you ever noticed that there's always a market correction at the time that you're actually investing in those pensions? So you get into an RSP-based pension and you basically plan, "If I put so much money away every month and every year, and it grows at—I'll be very conservative—an average of 4.5%, I will be able to retire after so-many years with X amount of money," and all of a sudden there's a market correction. I've had two of them in my short little lifetime, and both of those market corrections have probably wiped out whatever gains I made in the market. Quite frankly, I think that's the reason why we have market corrections: to make sure that people like me don't get too far ahead, and those people with lots of money on Bay Street and Wall Street can take the money and run away to the Cayman Islands and do what they do. The market is not game for workers; the market is game for the large investors.

The question becomes, what do you do? I think what Andrea Horwath has put forward as the provincial leader of the New Democratic Party is a reasoned first step, and that is to basically mirror what we have in the Canada pension plan here in Ontario so that every worker in province of Ontario would basically default into an Ontario pension plan unless they ask to get out because they have their own defined pension plan. For example, if I'm a worker where there is a defined pension plan, I would be able to say, "Listen, I've already got a defined pension plan that will give me \$1,500 a month, or \$2,500

a month. I don't need the Ontario pension plan. I default out." It would be their choice. Because you have to recognize that there are 20% to 30% who have adequate pensions in our society. But for the rest of us, we would be able to at least opt into a system that allows us to have a pension that is somewhat equal to the Canada pension plan.

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The Ontario pension plan that is being put forward by Madame Horwath for the Ontario New Democratic Party deals with giving people an opportunity to at least have a decent income on retirement. When you retire at age 65, you would have three pensions that would basically top on to each other. You would have your old age pension at age 65. You add your Canada pension and your Ontario pension plan—at age 50 if you go early. The combination of the three would give you somewhere over \$2,000 a month.

I'm the first to agree. Is that enough for some? Probably not. But at least it's enough to be able to pay the taxes, the insurance on your home, the utilities, the gas in your vehicle and the groceries on the table and the basic things that you have to do. The rest of it, you try to do yourself from your own savings and whatever means are available to you. I think that is a fair compromise.

I would hope, in a debate such as this, that the government would use the opportunity to say, "You know what? Andrea Horwath and the NDP are on to something. There's a good idea here. Maybe we should do it." You know what? God bless. If you want to take Andrea Horwath's and the NDP's idea and you want to wrap it up in a Liberal bill, go for it. I think it's a fair compromise, and that's how this House should work.

Instead, what have we got? We have the government that introduces Bill 236. Bill 236 deals only with those people who have a defined pension, which is around 30% of our population, and deals at the margins with the problems that people are having on pensions.

For those people who have seen their pensions being devalued by the fact that their employers have gone bankrupt—AbitibiBowater, for example; Nortel and others; Pamour, the place that I used to work—those who have had their pensions devalued, are we responding to the issue of insolvency? At the margins only. We're not dealing with making whole those pensioners who are going to be losing part of their pension as a result of what has happened in the market, as far as the stock market, or what has happened with employers. Is that fair?

I see here that the president of the CAW local, Monsieur Dennis Couvrette, who's here—a good friend of mine, who is a member of the coalition to save Xstrata. He understands as well as I do that there are a whole bunch of people in our community who find themselves in the situation where their pension is being devalued because the employer has gone bankrupt. We had that happen with Royal Oak. We have it with people at Nortel who live in our community. They have come to us at our own meetings and talked about this particular issue and said, "How are you going to make me whole?"

These people worked all their lives—30, 35, 40 years for an employer. They were told that if they'd take less wages every year and they put more money in their pensions, they would be able to retire with a decent income. And what do they find? The vagaries of the market, and the individual company strategies that have basically put some of these companies under, and the overall economic situation have made their pension less whole than it should have been. This bill doesn't deal with making sure that those people are made whole.

I think at the very least, what the government could have done, if you're going to deal with those people who have pensions, is to have a mechanism to allow that to happen so that we can make whole those people who have lost value on their pensions because of a reduction of the stock market or because of investment decisions on the part of a company.

Again, I say it wasn't the worker, be it either staff or union, that basically said, "I want to make this pension less valuable." It's the marketplace, as far as the stock market, and in some cases, decisions of the company, such as we're seeing with AbitibiBowater.

So I say, are you dealing with that in whole in this legislation? No. You're taking a step forward but you're not dealing with that in whole.

I hope, during the time that we get into committee on this particular bill, that we're able to hear from people and able to make some amendments in order to deal with the issue of insolvency within pensions.

The other issue is this surplus-sharing agreement that you're putting inside the legislation. One of the things that I have always been opposed to is allowing employers to use the surpluses in the pension to their own benefit.

You know what? If the investment of that pension has meant that there is a surplus, that surplus should remain within the pension and be there for the benefit of the people who have paid into the pension. That's not the money of the company. That is the deferred wages of workers who have said, "I will take less on the hourly rate in order to get the money on my pension." In some cases, when the market is high, some of these pensions have made some extra money as a result of their investments. Well, those are not investments that the company made. That's not the money of the company. Even if the pension was 100% paid by the employer, that is the money of the workers. The workers are the ones who have said, "I will defer income in order to get a pension." Those surpluses should not in any way, shape or form be subject to any benefit of the employer, period. Does this legislation deal with that? No, it doesn't. It makes some changes, but it doesn't deal with that.

We should get into a proper debate about how we deal with surpluses in a pension. One of the things that I would say upfront is that the surplus in the pension should be protected to a degree, so that when there is a correction in the marketplace, as we saw a year and a half ago, that correction would be somewhat buffered from the losses that happened in the marketplace or, if it is sufficient enough, would benefit the workers who are

going to be retiring or who are in retirement. That would be the very least that I think we could do. Again, the details of that you need to work out in committee, but I think that is a fair discussion that we should have in committee in order to deal with those issues that are important. At times, pensions do have surpluses, and we need to make sure that we have a mechanism that deals with those surpluses so that they in fact are of benefit to those people who retire.

The other issue is the superintendent's powers. In the legislation it says, "The superintendent is authorized to approve agreements in restructuring proceedings under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act ... and under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act." What that means, the long and the short of it, is that if I'm a worker—and that's what happened to me; I worked for Royal Oak and, before that, Noranda. When they went under, we, the workers, ended up at the end of the line. We ended up having our pensions somewhat protected by the \$1,000 a month insurance that is there from the pension insurance commission of Ontario, but the issue is that if anything over that is not funded, the employees end up at the very end of the line, and that's what happened to the Nortel workers. That's probably what's going to happen to AbitibiBowater, if that happens the way we think it might.

So in this section of the law we need to ensure that we have a way of making sure that workers are protected when it comes to bankruptcy, so that if there are assets left at the end of the bankruptcy, there is some mechanism to allow workers to share in whatever those assets are. Am I arguing that all of the money should just go to the pensioners? No, because there are other creditors. But I think we need to have a saner and more fair way of approaching who is able to access the assets of the company that are sold on the windup of the company, at the end of the bankruptcy. I think, again, those are debates that we can have and those are discussions that we can have in committee that would be of use.

The point that I want to end on—I've only got a few minutes left—is to go back and say this is a step that doesn't bring us to where we need to get, and that is to ensure that workers in this province, all workers—management, hourly rated, politicians, people who work at McDonald's, people who work wherever, you name it—have an opportunity to have a pension in their 30-, 35-, 40-year work cycle.

It is unsustainable as a society that we have so many people who are retiring without pensions. We see it, I would say, almost on a daily basis in most of our constituency offices. People come into the office and say, "I can't make ends meet at the end of the month. What have I done wrong? I've worked all my life. I've paid my bills. I've raised my family. I've done everything and played by the rules. At the end, I'm not able to make ends meet because the cost of living is outstripping what I'm getting in my retirement on CPP and on old age pension," especially single incomes, women or men who are left widowed, who have to live on their own once the

spouse is gone and there isn't the second pension kicking in. Far too often, in all of our constituency offices, we are in the situation of having to deal with the retired poor who have to face that challenge every day. So I think we need to challenge ourselves to deal with that.

The last point I would make is this: We need to deal with those issues in our communities that allow us to keep people in their jobs. I just want to say in the last two minutes I have that we have an opportunity here in Ontario to do what is right. Xstrata has announced the shutdown of the refinery and smelter in the city of Timmins for mid-May. I have brought, on behalf of the New Democratic caucus, a bill that basically says what Newfoundland does, which is that any ore that is extracted has to be processed in the province of Ontario. I think we in this Legislature owe it to the people of Timmins—James Bay and the people, some 3,000 of them across this province, who benefit from this mine to be able to have those jobs as a result of the extraction of ore that we do in the city of Timmins. I think at the end of the day—and I hear my good friend Mr. Zimmer laughing.

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Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, it's not laughing about that. I will correct—

Mr. David Zimmer: No, no.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, very good.

Mr. David Zimmer: I respect what you're saying.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, very good. He was reading a good article. That sounds pretty interesting.

Anyway, we have an opportunity to do what's right. At the very least, if the government is not going to support that, then what is their response? I would just say that we in northern Ontario support wholeheartedly what both the federal and provincial governments tried to do and have done in order to support auto workers in places like Oshawa, Windsor and others when that industry was in trouble. The only thing we're asking is not for bailouts; we're asking for this government to assist us in finding a way to get Xstrata to keep its doors open because, at the end of the day, is this a company that's losing money? Was it \$2.7 billion last year? A \$2.7-billion profit on the part of Xstrata. Certainly to God \$2.7 billion is not a short amount of money. If we can find some way of being able to entice and get this company to do what's right and keep people working at the smelter refinery in the community of Timmins, I think it doesn't just benefit the workers but benefits all of the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Glen R. Murray: I've got to say that I was completely perplexed by the member from Thornhill. Here's a fellow whose government eliminated pensions for members of this assembly, cashed out hundreds of thousands of dollars, and then had the government pay the taxes for members here. Now he comes before us

today saying, “We should reinstate pensions for members”—

Mr. Peter Shurman: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I don't know what this member is talking about. His questions and comments are relating to a speech I made about half an hour ago, not to the speech that has just taken place from the member from James Bay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member for Toronto Centre to confine his comments to the speech that was just given.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: It's interesting that they don't want to hear the truth. That's helpful.

There's some consistency in my friend's position from Timmins–James Bay that hasn't been from some previous speakers as well. You can't have a system where you attack us in government for wanting to be all things to all people, which has been the tone of the debate to this point. We bring forward a piece of legislation that corrects an existing problem in a—

Interjection.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Madam Speaker, as soon as we have order, I'll continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We have order. You have eight seconds to continue.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will just say that given the inconsistencies of my friend, I will promise to extend him greater courtesy when he speaks, but that has been the pattern on his part.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Timmins–James Bay, I believe, got it right when he was talking about the opportunities here.

It's the real thing here. We should look at the pension benefits guarantee fund—it's not in this, but that's an important fund—at who can be members and who cannot be members of that and what is the amount of the entitlement. In fact, it's very little. It's up to \$1,000, and that fund itself is in a deficit position.

The key thing that I think is worth mentioning—there are three parts to the legislation that I think are critical. One is the grow-in provision, the grow-in benefits, and I'm just going to take the time here to read them, if there's anybody paying attention.

The phased retirement option is an important option, but more importantly the “consolidation of benefits under a single pension plan”—I want to commend the member from Simcoe–Grey, who almost a year ago brought this up as a private member's bill. What this allowed is that members who were disenfranchised, if you will, with changes in the government's delivery model of service—and the case in point here were the CCACs, community care access centres. Many worked in hospitals and settings who could not transfer their pensions to the new organization, the CCAC. Also, ambulance drivers—at one time in this province, they worked for municipalities, they worked for the province and they worked for the hospitals themselves. They were in three different pension groups. Many of them became disenfranchised

from their original pension. Section 80.1 of the act corrects that problem for perhaps 10,000 individuals in this province. I think that's a worthy comment from the member from Simcoe–Grey and to the minister.

We are not being tokenistic here. There are some significant and important changes, and I think if people take the time, in this technical discussion, to follow up on the grow-in, the phased-in retirement options and section 80, the consolidation of benefits, they'll see there is some substance. However, this is not the easiest—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen intently to the comments from the member from Timmins–James Bay. He hit on something that I think is very important: the idea of savings. It's interesting to look at Hansard from the mid-1960s from the federal Parliament of Canada when the Prime Minister of the day, Mr. Pearson, introduced the Canada pension plan and the Quebec hybrid, QPP. If you look at that discussion, they did talk about the baby boom generation eventually retiring—the baby boom generation typically defined as those born from 1946, 1947 through to 1961, 1962—and it's interesting to look at that debate to see how people were looking ahead through that CPP debate. I think that's very important, the issue that was touched upon here by the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Indeed, the member from Simcoe—and I found out just recently, and I actually talked to his office, about the number of people in Peterborough that were formerly enrolled in HOOPP's pension plan, who were then transferred into OMERS because they were EMS people who worked for a hospital, worked for the municipality and now found themselves transferred to the county of Peterborough because of the change of responsibilities.

Indeed, this bill, Bill 236, is the first bill as a result of the Arthurs commission, which looked into the future of pensions in the province of Ontario, and this is a start.

I personally found out about the pension issue when a small company in Peterborough went into bankruptcy, Peterborough Paper Converters. I worked with the local union, the communications workers, to try to resolve a number of issues with regard to the pension benefits guarantee plan to make sure that they would have the \$1,000 in place.

So the member from Timmins–James Bay touched on a lot of good points. This is a start, and, collectively, we'll move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments or questions?

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much to the speakers who commented on what I had to say.

To the member from Toronto Centre: I don't take exception that you were trying to speak to somebody else's debate. You're new here. It'll take a little while to get the steps and how this place operates, but I hear what you're saying.

I just want to say again that it is really an opportunity that we have here as legislators to actually do something

that's right. I've got to say, I'm quite pleased and proud that our leader, Andrea Horwath, has put forward this proposal that would allow people to have a basic pension such as CPP to be topped up to their own income as an Ontario pension plan. I think that's a reasonable step, and I think it's one that the government should be thinking about. If not, I can guarantee you that we will be talking about that in the next provincial election.

As for Bill 236, I want to make sure that my honourable friend, the whip on the other side, my co-whip, as we would say, understands that I am not giving support to this legislation. I want you to understand that, at this point, I am not supporting it. I think that, yes, it is an attempt to deal with some of the issues; I'm not going to say it's not. But it ain't dealing with some of the major issues, and the big one is insolvency. You have all kinds of workers who have had their pensions devalued because of insolvency, and we're not dealing with that in this legislation. On that alone—and that's an issue for many. I've got many people in my constituency who are at risk of losing their pension with AbitibiBowater. I have other people who work for Nortel, and I have other workers who have already been affected by issues of insolvency, and I think that's one issue that we need to deal with.

I look forward to this bill going into committee, and I hope in committee that we're able to do the kind of work that we should be doing, and that is to try to find some reasonable way to deal with these issues so that workers are able to retire with a decent pension when they decide to retire.

1750

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important issue. I've been here this whole afternoon listening to the debate that is taking place. It's interesting to hear the perspectives that are coming out. I'll be very honest with you that I've found the whole debate to be quite educational, from my perspective, because I think we've been hearing from a certain demographic thus far. People have been talking about their pension plans in the past or how it may be impacted today. I come from an age group where, honestly speaking, I don't know much about pensions, because I never had a pension. Most likely, I won't have a pension. Prior to being—

Interjections.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Well, there are no pensions for MPPs, so the member for Timmins—James Bay is correct, and folks out there do think that MPPs get pensions; they don't. Members of Parliament get pensions but not members of provincial Parliament. But even in the private sector, where I was before, practising law, there was no pension. It's interesting to look at that issue now, especially with the uncertainty that exists in our global economy, how the issue of pensions has surfaced, because those pension plans have been in serious jeo-

pardy. I think we've had quite a few illuminating comments about that.

The important question is, "Is the way we have known pensions in the past going to be the trend in the future?" Pensions are expensive. Public pensions are very expensive. If you look around at the status of governments right now federally and provincially, all governments have major deficits. I think, for the foreseeable future, it's going to be difficult for governments to be able to really implement or put in place rich pension plans. That becomes a serious issue. Again, from my generational point of view—and I'm among friends or talking to constituents who are young parents and having a discussion around pensions—it's something I don't think we even think about much, because that's not something we're expecting. We obviously try to save money and invest that in RSPs etc., but I think we have come to the reality that really we will not have a pension. But I think what's important is that the discussion that comes around is about retirement income. Okay, I might not have a pension, but what kind of support would I have when I'm 65, 70 or 75? I think at that time we'll probably be working longer, as many people work longer today. What kind of retirement income would I have? Would I have retirement income to be self-supporting, that I would be investing, as I do in my RRSPs, and hoping that there would be enough money in place for me to live sufficiently in my retirement?

I think that is why it is extremely important that we in Canada engage in some sort of debate about retirement income. We need to make sure that collectively we say—and not just at the provincial level, because I think this problem is bigger than only one province dealing with it. Again, money is a big issue because all this stuff costs a lot of money, and with all the competing priorities we've got in terms of health care and public education, we have to be mindful as to where we invest our scarce resources. So I think it's imperative that we do engage in a national dialogue, that we do sit down nationally—all provinces and territories with the federal government—to have a discussion about retirement income, to have a discussion about what kind of system we can put in place, especially for those people who already live on a low income today, so that they have some sort of support available to them when they retire. Not everybody is like us in this Legislature, making \$116,000 or more and having the luxury to save some money on the side in the hope that the market will bode well in the long term and we'll have some sort of nest egg. So that type of discussion is extremely, extremely important.

In my riding of Ottawa Centre recently, of course, with the economic downturn, this issue around pensions became extremely important because I have a lot of Nortel pensioners who live in Ottawa Centre. I have had many, many meetings with those Nortel pensioners to better understand what kind of pension plan exists, what kinds of regulatory regimes, both federal and provincial, exist when it comes to bankruptcy protection for Nortel and what it means in terms of the possible windup of

those Nortel pensions. I've had the privilege of working with Don Sproule—quite a few of us have heard from Don. He's actually a constituent of mine. He represents the Nortel pensioners. Rob Patterson is another gentleman in my riding whom I'm in constant dialogue with—and David Jeanes, who has been very instructive to me in terms of bringing issues for Nortel pensioners forward.

Obviously we've been engaged in a dialogue with them. I've been working with the Minister of Finance to highlight some of the concerns for Nortel pensioners. Again, these are pensioners who have worked very hard. They contributed to a defined pension plan, and now, with the economic downturn and the potential bankruptcy of Nortel, they're facing a very stark reality—that is, their pension plans may not exist. After working that much, being able to contribute and being at the age they are, that is a tough reality to face.

I'm really pleased that most recently, a few weeks ago, the Minister of Finance announced that the government of Ontario will be funding the pension benefits guarantee fund, the PBGF. I've been working on that file for some time along with the Nortel pensioners in my riding of Ottawa Centre. To get the commitment that that money is being put aside, if needed, to ensure that under PBGF up to \$1,000 will be paid out to the Nortel pensioners is an important step, because it allows a level of surety or certainty to Nortel pensioners.

We still need to do more work. Obviously, the next step for Nortel pensioners in my riding is to work around the scenarios: If there is a windup of Nortel assets, how do we deal with the pension plan as it relates to the Canadian pensioners? We've heard about the assaults that are taking place with Nortel pensioners in the United Kingdom right now and with the American Nortel pensioners because they're looking at Nortel assets here in Canada, which highlights the need to strengthen the pension system. We need to make sure that we reform the pension system, and Bill 236, as it has been tabled, is a first step in that direction.

The Minister of Finance has been quite clear that there will be another piece of legislation coming forward to this House to further reform our pension benefits system, but I think this economic climate—the way the market crashed, the kind of recession we just lived through in 2009 and are finally getting out of and moving towards recovery—has highlighted that the rules that were put in place are perhaps outdated—which happens, because you cannot create rules and regulations that will be good for all times, and we need to adapt. Bill 236 is trying to do that: adapt the pension benefits system to what is needed today.

If I look at some of the key things that have been brought forward through this legislation, I see that the Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2009, Bill 236, will extend the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs and eliminate partial windups. It means that more people will get more pension benefits in more circumstances. If this bill is passed, it will be easier to restructure pension plans affected by corporate reorganizations so coverage

can continue for affected workers. Also, this bill, if passed, will increase transparency and access to information for plan members and pensioners. These are important steps so that we can start reforming our pension plan system.

There's also some short-term relief that's embedded in this bill. There is the need to preserve a system that protects the retirements of pensioners while ensuring that pension plans are affordable for employers—you always have a balance to reach between the cost to employees and employers, and that's an important thing; extension of solvency and amortization periods from five to 10 years, with the consent of active members; deferral of catch-up payments to provide one year of cash flow relief; enhanced notice to active and retired plan members etc. Again, these are important things.

Like I said earlier, I'll confess I don't understand the ins and outs of pensions because I've never had one, so I never had to deal with one. But I think what is highlighted is that we need to deal with the issue of pensions, we need to look at current pension plans and we need to reform them, but what we also need to look at, which is a bigger question that is valid for all ages—including mine—is to have a system for retirement income in Canada.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

1800

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

LABOUR DISPUTE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand-Norfolk has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given on Thursday, February 18, by the Minister of Labour. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. As you've pointed out, I do wish to express my dissatisfaction with the answer to my question given to the Minister of Labour last Thursday with respect to the layoff and lockout at US Steel in Nanticoke. Dissatisfaction is born from the fact that the labour minister made no attempt whatsoever to provide any information to what really were some very direct questions that I was putting forward.

That question again, and I quote myself: "What have you personally done in the past year to get a thousand steelworkers back to work?" That's a pretty straightforward question, and I sincerely hope somebody has picked up the phone since then. I would have been satisfied with an answer to any of a series of other

questions that I raised in this Legislative Assembly: "Have you or has your minister met with the company?"—I directed that to the Premier. "Have you met with the steelworkers? Have you taken any steps whatsoever to save these jobs?"

Check the Hansard. You'll find no answers to these questions. I'll add another question that has been asked before: Has the Premier or the Minister of Labour met with the Canadian or the US government?

We have a situation. We have US Steel Canadian plants vulnerable to foreign competition from US Steel American plants: Gary, Indiana, for example. I sincerely hope that, as a result of my questions last week, Ontario's labour minister or perhaps the Premier has picked up the phone and talked to US Steel and, ideally, picked up the phone and talked with Local 8782.

While we're on the subject of unanswered questions, I can also report that those out at the front gates outside of Lake Erie Works at Nanticoke have enough questions to fill that idled steelmaking facility down there. This Saturday I was asked by some of the fellows out front to try and find out how this government thinks the investment of \$150 million into the former Stelco pensions has gone over. Has US Steel returned the loan or is this just seen as another incentive to keep them doing business in Ontario? So my question there is: How is that one working out? How is it working out for well over 1,000 people suffering the impacts of close to one year now where we have had a layoff and a lockout? It's not a strike; it's a layoff and a lockout. Again, the question is: Is this government speaking with Ottawa about this?

Steelworkers also wonder if this government has simply chalked up Lake Erie Works and this massive workforce as out of sight, out of mind—a world-class steelmaking facility out of the eyesight of Queen's Park, obviously. The worry is: Are they prepared to continue just to forget about what's going on down there? We've seen this with Caledonia, just up the road.

I do visit the plant gate. Instead of workers heading back and forth, I see wild turkeys, I see deer, I see raptors. We hear coyotes at night when we're down there at the line. I just wish somebody would come down and take a look at a facility that once anchored the regional economy.

I hope the minister is on top of his own file, to let us know about a recent meeting his staff had with union officials in February. Again, this wasn't mentioned. Either the minister didn't know about it, or he knew but realized nothing was accomplished, or he knew but in contrast to his statement—and again, I quote. He stated, "My focus and the Ministry of Labour's focus is always to work with the parties so that they can put their differences aside." However, at that meeting, Ministry of Labour staff recommended the union file bad-faith-bargaining charges. I find that somewhat divisive.

I spent a lot of time in this mill, back when it was Stelco. I consulted to that company. It's time this government—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has expressed dissatisfaction with the Minister of Labour's response to his question during last Thursday's question period. As parliamentary assistant for the Ministry of Labour, I welcome the opportunity to speak to this issue. It allows me to reiterate the minister's response that the Ministry of Labour has been working closely with both sides to help them reach a collective agreement and end this labour dispute.

As you know, the Minister of Labour cannot discuss the specifics of any labour dispute. As he explained last Thursday during question period, Minister Fonseca is not interested in splitting the parties further apart by intervening in a private labour dispute. Rather, our government believes in a fair and balanced approach to labour relations, and our system works.

Our labour relations record is the best it has been in several decades. Over the past few years, approximately 97% of negotiations have resulted in settlements, with no work stoppages. This is an outstanding result.

In this specific dispute, the Ministry of Labour's mediation team has worked closely with both US Steel Canada and United Steelworkers of America Local 8782. They have assisted the parties at the bargaining table and remain available to continue these efforts when the parties decide to resume negotiations. The Ministry of Labour mediation team is made up of highly skilled and extremely professional individuals. They work hard, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to find ways to assist the parties to resume negotiations and reach an agreement.

As Minister Fonseca explained last Thursday, our ministry's focus is on ensuring that our mediation services are doing everything possible to support the two parties and the negotiation process.

Our ministry has met with the executive of United Steelworkers of America Local 8782, as they approached us with a number of questions related to their members' ability to access certain government programs. As they would with any other stakeholder who has questions and concerns, the ministry sat down with the local executive and listened to what they had to say. There were discussions about employment insurance, the Ontario Works program, upgrading of trades qualifications and a number of other matters. We also facilitated meetings between the steelworkers and other ministries, specifically the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as well as the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

We are also working with the federal government to support Ontario's workforce. Minister Fonseca has just returned from the annual meeting with the federal labour minister and his labour counterparts in the rest of the provinces and territories. He made special arrangements to sit down, one on one, with his federal counterpart, Minister Raitt, to discuss better protection for Ontarians who are not working. He also raised the need for better protection with all provincial and territorial Ministers of Labour at the annual meeting.

But it seems that I need to remind the member for Haldimand–Norfolk that it is ultimately the responsibility

of the employer and the union to resolve their differences at the bargaining table.

During this difficult and frustrating time for the people of Nanticoke, it is imperative that the two sides think about their position and the position of the other party. While bargaining can be difficult and stressful, they must ultimately set aside their differences and work toward a compromise. Only then can a lasting agreement between US Steel Canada and the Steelworkers be reached.

It is the agreements reached by the employer and the union through the negotiation process that are the best agreements, the most stable and the most productive. That is why my government supports the collective bargaining process.

I would also like to take the opportunity to remind the member from Haldimand–Norfolk of his government's

labour relations record when they were in power. There were twice as many work stoppages under the Harris government as under the McGuinty government. That's an average of 1,194,786 person-days lost per year under their government.

To conclude, I'd like to point out that it's quite ironic that the member opposite is holding himself up as a friend of union members. When his party was in government, there were toxic relations between our province's unions and the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1810.

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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
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Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
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Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
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Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Khalil Ramal
Clerks / Greffiers: William Short (pro tem.), Sylwia Przedzdiecki

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Wayne Arthurs
Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Eric Hoskins, Pat Hoy
Norm Miller, Charles Sousa
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: David Oraziotti
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Helena Jaczek
Helena Jaczek, Kuldip Kular
Amrit Mangat, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, Reza Moridi
David Oraziotti, Joyce Savoline
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Laura Albanese, Michael A. Brown
Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Rick Johnson, Lisa MacLeod
Yasir Naqvi, Leeanna Pendergast
Jim Wilson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Jeff Leal, Dave Levac
Leeanna Pendergast, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Khalil Ramal
Bas Balkissoon, Jim Brownell
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Michael Prue
Khalil Ramal
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
France Gélinas, Phil McNeely
Jerry J. Ouellette, David Ramsay
Liz Sandals, Peter Shurman
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przedzdiecki

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Sophia Aggelonitis, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Linda Jeffrey
Sylvia Jones, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Carol Mitchell, Shafiq Qadri
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

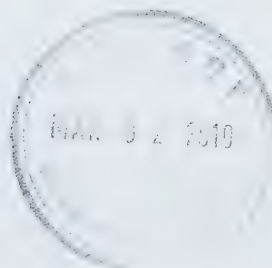
Première session, 39^e législature

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 24 February 2010

Mercredi 24 février 2010



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 24 February 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 24 février 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Baha'i prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENERGY CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉNERGIE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 17, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 235, An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010 and to amend other Acts / Projet de loi 235, Loi édictant la Loi de 2010 sur la protection des consommateurs d'énergie et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: Speaker, I was at the tail end of my 20 minutes, and I believe I've got about three or four minutes left. I wanted to do a little bit of a wrap-up by reviewing the issues that I brought before the House in regard to Bill 235, the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010.

What we talked about were the seven key problems that were identified by the public for the retailers, which were: salespersons' practices at the door—consumers don't have the information they need to decide because of language barriers; verbal contracts, usually by phone; contracts not with an account holder; consumers feeling pressured into signing a contract at the door—pressure tactics; unfair cancellation policies and fees; automatic renewal of gas contracts; electricity retailers and gas marketers not having accountability because they put third party collectors in there, and we need to have them culpable for their actions. Fixed contracts don't clearly disclose all the costs or offer products promoting conservation.

Those kinds of issues during that particular section of the bill were explained both by the minister and by myself. We now move to suite metering, which allows us to identify some of the problems there, which were: no framework to install suite metering in rental apartment buildings, no rules for individual billing in rental apartment buildings, and the like. The other one is regarding

deposits and disconnections, which was important, and that is that gas and electricity companies work under different rules regarding invoices, disconnecting and security charges, which this bill will address.

The bill will not cover all the issues that I'm sure the opposition and others, including ourselves, would want to discuss. It's not the kind of bill that is somewhat of an omnibus bill, but as I indicated, I as parliamentary assistant have an extreme willingness to listen to concerns and to the issues. I reinforce one more time that we will definitely be going into committee and having the stakeholders and the public at large make presentations. One more point that I made clear to the opposition when they asked was that we will definitely be doing a consultation when we deal with the regulatory stream that accompanies the bill.

I do look forward to further debate, further discussion, further issues that need to be raised. And as parliamentary assistant to the previous minister, I make the same commitment today; that is, I will engage in a listening exercise and make sure that if good ideas will help us make it a better bill, I will be encouraging all staff to participate in that activity to ensure that we do protect consumers in a bill where we say we are trying to protect the consumer.

Having said that, I will wait for the responses from the opposition and from my members, and look forward to continuation of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to respond to this important bill. The member from Brant, as I recall, summarized some of his concerns. I do want to acknowledge that I hope to have the opportunity to speak on this this morning. There are so many people on our side of the House who are here and want to speak—well, one of them is actually leaving now.

One of the things, the sub-metering, does become an issue. When you get into the apartments, many of which are not efficient, the actual discretionary use—discretionary use at time—is very important. A lot of them are seniors—not all but a lot. A lot have income—not all; I don't like to generalize with any particular group. A lot are often in a situation where they don't have a lot of control.

The real treachery of the smart meter itself is that it is really not a smart meter. I see Phil here. He's an engineer; he knows. A smart meter would allow you to remotely turn on and off appliances such as hot water heaters or air conditioners. That's a smart meter. This is

actually a time-of-use meter. It's a disguise, because—and people of Ontario should pay attention here—they're actually raising the price of electricity. When you use electricity on-peak, you're going to pay twice as much for it. They're saying you should use it off-peak. If you don't have full control with timers and other devices to switch the load usage, you're going to be paying more.

So what I can tell you is that, for sure, this bill does the right thing with respect to retailers knocking on your door and demanding certain information—some of it you should not give them, by the way. It's going to put an end to and solve that. But the poison pill here is the smart meter issue itself. I'm in support of the bill, because it takes care of the issue of people knocking on your door and causing you headaches, but at the same time there's always a poison pill in every piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm looking forward to hearing the comments from the member for Durham, because his comments around sub-metering appear to make sense to me—I'm not sure what the government has to say about that. But he's got 20 minutes coming up soon, and I find that commentary interesting.

All I wanted to say to the member from Brant is that I really appreciate when a parliamentary assistant says, "I will be listening to what deputants have to say, and what opposition parties have to say, with a view to making changes or lobbying for change, if necessary." I find that very useful to hear. Generally, very few changes are made in committee by the governing party; that's just the way it has been historically. But I find it encouraging when a parliamentary assistant says, "I want to listen to good ideas, and if they're good ideas, I want to lobby for those kinds of changes." That is good.

The member from Oakville, in two committees I was at, did make an effort as well on some issues, I have to admit. On others he was a bit reluctant, and I understand that; his minister was even more reluctant than he.

But when members make an effort—that is, the parliamentary assistants—to hear the arguments and then to carry those arguments to the minister, saying, "There were good arguments to be made. Why can't we do that?" that's the most you can expect of them. I just wanted to thank the member from Brant for saying that.

0910

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Being from Ottawa–Orléans, primarily a bedroom community of single-family homes, the energy retailers are the big issue in our area. I'm very pleased that this bill is coming forward, because we received, as did all members, a lot of complaints about practices which were not acceptable.

Parts of the process will be information brochures and Ontario Energy Board telephone service in 21 languages, key information required in large font on the first page of the contract, explanatory information on energy bills and improved safeguards for customers. Contract signatures

must be text-based and not simply provided over the phone; a third party is to contact the customer to ensure contracts were wilfully entered into. A standard script will be required for contracts, verifications and renewals. Automatic renewals will not be permitted, and there will be enhanced cancellation policies and capped charges. There will be higher standards for the industry. All employees who deal with the public will be required to meet training standards. The OEB will appoint a director to ensure companies abide by the act. The OEB will provide reports to the minister on enforcement action.

All these, when they come into effect, will protect the people at the door. I mean, the stories—we've all heard them—about signing contracts with two different companies, the pressure tactics, asking for your energy bill, looking as if they were there from the government sometimes—all these things will be controlled in the new act and will protect the homeowners.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Oakville, you were standing for that?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I will pass.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend from Oakville for that indulgence. I wanted to come into this House because I've received something and I have a particular issue around energy retailers, where I've received a letter personally from a company called Bond Street Collections Inc., and they tell me that I owe a bill to a company called Just Energy Ontario LP, formerly Ontario Energy Savings LP. They're telling me that I owe them money, plus interest, and that they're going to send me to a collection agency. They say, "If you just pay this amount"—a company that I have never signed a contract with—"we'll waive the interest and the fees." And then conveniently, at the bottom, they're asking me to jot down the name on my utility invoice, the address, the utility provider and my utility account number. And it says, "Average rate during your contractual period: 39.3" square metres or something, and to lock in now at a price, to sign and date it, on a little thing they can detach.

This has got to stop. I'm waiting for the energy retailers to come to this place—I understand they're having a reception—because I want to talk to them about this. I've never signed a contract with this company, I have never had anybody send me to a collection company and I find this to be particularly misleading.

There is a need for a reform in this province of these practices and we are going to protect the consumers in this province, because this stuff has got to stop. I want to thank the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure for bringing this bill in. If there is anything in this House that everyone is going to vote for unanimously, it's going to be about this reform, because this reform is well overdue. Put them on notice that this stuff is going to stop, because our constituents, our consumers, are fed up with this. That's why we brought this bill in and I hope we all vote for it. I'm sure we will.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Brant, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dave Levac: After that, I'm sure that everyone will stand up and vote in favour of the bill, for sure.

I want to thank the member from Durham, obviously, and the member from Trinity-Spadina for his kind words. I hope he keeps my feet to the fire with my commitment to him and to the rest of this House. The member from Ottawa-Orléans has a very strong background on this portfolio, and I thank him for his comments, and obviously the Minister of Revenue, for revving me up and making sure that we get that bill passed.

I do have a couple of quick comments, and I do look forward to the member from Durham's—I think he has negotiated the opportunity to speak. I'm getting the nod that he has finally been given the okay. I do want to correct one thing that he did say, and I hope he would acknowledge that we need to have that correction out there. We're not doubling the cost during peak time; that's the set price. We're giving a reduction in price when you do the off-peak time for energy use. I'm sure he would not want to inflame the seniors out there, thinking that we are going to double their cost; that's not correct. What we are going to do is set the price, and then, if you use off-time energy, you get a cost reduction. That's the hope of this.

I do look forward to his comments on the so-called poison pill part of the bill. I don't characterize it that way. I suggest to him very respectfully that this is a new way of doing things. It offers us an opportunity to learn how to conserve energy and gives us assistance in doing so, for those who are able.

One of the things I know that the member from Trinity-Spadina and his colleagues in the NDP mentioned was apartments and the condition they are in. There are going to be some other retrofit programs outside of this piece of legislation that encourage people to fix their apartment buildings so that we can find savings there, too.

I look forward to the continuation of the debate and I thank all the members for participating in this particular part.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: They did give him a chance.

Mr. John O'Toole: Someone has to make sure there's a voice here to be contributing to this important bill.

I should put on the record right away that our critic, Mr. Yakabuski, has made it very clear that substantively we are in support of the bill. I guess we could end it there and adjourn until 10:30, but I'm going to use the time to represent my constituents in the riding of Durham and raise just some of the small questions.

Yes, the smart meter—the time-of-use meter—is in this bill, under the sub-metering. Sub-metering refers to apartment buildings, some of which today have one big meter. Electricity comes into the building and the charges incurred on that meter will be spread amongst the 10 or 20 or 100 units in the building. That's basically how it

works. The discretionary problem that is there is that the tenant is a price taker. The landlord, by the Tenant Protection Act, has some ability to spread these costs over each unit. But one unit could have the windows open and the oven on, or be heating the apartment with the oven, and yet the one that is trying to be conscious of the environment and is conserving would have to pay. So it's a good idea, probably, to sub-meter.

But there may be investments required by the landlord. I hope they can pass those on to the tenants as part of the rent increases, and they will, because that's a provision that they apply to the Assessment Review Board, I think it is, and the board can approve those rate increases, which could be improving the efficiency and the safety and those kinds of provisions within the apartment.

Often—and I'm not going to characterize all the landlords as being from the past; I think that some of them are quite good. They're investments, by the way. They have to take care of the building to the extent that it's an investment for them that should generate some sort of return. But they often have very poor insulation, often have very poor windows, often don't have the most efficient appliances—those kinds of things. So even if the appliances, say, are supplied, they're probably the cheapest ones you can get. They're not Energy Star rated, probably. Hopefully, I'm not generalizing too much here. But that means that the tenant is going to be disadvantaged because of the windows and the insulation and inefficient things.

Now, here's the real thing for general consumers in Ontario. If you look at your electricity bill, which is what this is really about at the end of the day—we do want to get rid of these retailers, these people knocking on the door and infringing on your privacy etc.—that's for sure. But at the end of the day, this is really a more serious debate about energy itself and the cost of it.

0920

I want to commend Andrea Horwath, the leader of the NDP, who raised a very, very good question yesterday, and that was with respect to the HST. I know that the Minister of Revenue—the minister of increasing taxes—is here this morning, and he will probably respond to it in his two minutes, but we've done some calculations. If you are using, say, \$100 worth of electricity, you're going to be paying \$8 more. Let's say it's only \$100 a week for your utilities. Okay, that's going to be \$8 a week. Stay with me here. How many weeks in a year? Fifty two. Eight times 52 is four hundred and some dollars—\$416. That's just one thing.

Let's say you commute to work, or let's say you have to have physiotherapy once a week: 8% on every one of those expenditures. Let's say that your expenditures, on a monthly basis—let's just be civilized here—are \$1,000. That's 8% on \$1,000 for these discretionary expenditures, including electricity, natural gas, physiotherapy—you name it. Ms. Horwath raised it: It's going to cost \$225 a year for electricity and natural gas.

Now, the minister is probably going to say, "You're going to get \$300 back." Well, that's also income-tested. If you have income over \$80,000, they claw it back.

Hon. John Wilkinson: And then you get your income tax cut.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, yes, then you get your income tax cut. Well, it actually increases your income. No, it's not taxable, I'm led to believe.

But I want to stay on line. Here's the key: All of us want clean, safe, reliable energy. There's no question of that—we all want that—and we want it to be affordable as well. I believe that electricity is an essential commodity. It's not discretionary consumption like cable television; it's an essential commodity.

The discretionary use of energy is another shell game. Conservation is when you don't use electricity—you don't dry your clothes using electricity. That's conservation. When you choose to use a timer so that your dryer goes on in the middle of the night when electricity is cheaper, that's not conservation; that's load shifting. Conservation is when you don't use it. That's conserving it; that's real conservation. In other words, getting a clothesline and putting clothes outside is conservation.

My point here is that if you look at a normal couple, let's say a senior couple, it isn't that much; it's roughly 1,000 kilowatt hours a month of electricity. That's a generalization, but it's roughly that amount. The discretionary amount, according to technical reports, is about 8% of usage. That means turning the light off and not using the air conditioning, or a ventilator, if you happen to have a problem.

If you have electric heat, you're euchred, and most of these apartments with sub-metering have electric heat. You can't be turning that on and off because it's 3 o'clock in the afternoon and rates are very high—it's not quite double, but it's higher. At 3 o'clock in the morning, electricity will be quite cheap. So you have to look at the fairness of this issue.

I'm respectfully suggesting that you're going to use less electricity—I'm all for conservation, by the way—and you're going to be paying more. What the minister is going to say to you is, "Look, we can tell you how to save on your electricity bill. Look at your smart meter. Go to your computer. You'll be able to see a profile of usage and it will show you"—I'm sure there will be little subroutines on the program to show you that if you use your dishwasher and your clothes dryer at night or off-peak times, you could save money.

They're going to say to you, once you get these smart meters up and running, "Look, if you want to save, get some timers and shift that load to off-peak so it's cheaper." So it's your fault that you're using all this energy to cook your meals, have your shower in the morning and in the evening, bathe the children and wash your clothes. Busy families out working all day and coming home have no discretion. They have to cook the food, heat the house and maintain their personal hygiene etc. I don't think there's very much discretionary use.

As I said before, we see the devil is in the detail—not specifically this bill. I want to put this on the record. There's no question that we want to see significant changes and improvements, and I think the bill attempts

to achieve that. The bill is long overdue. In fact, the bill was promised in 2008-09.

I want to give Dave Ramsay, the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane—he used to be the Minister of Natural Resources. He's not a minister anymore. I don't know about that, either. He brought in a bill, and his bill would have easily improved things. The government has copied his bill. It says here—a similar bill last year that the government could have worked in, instead of choosing to let it die on the order paper, in favour of a government bill. So he actually had the same bill, and they've copied it, but didn't give him credit for it. I don't understand that.

We're largely supportive. I think it's important that there is training and oversight for these retail salespeople. I think that's good. The training and the whole marketing of it, I think, should be left to the retailers, meaning the local distribution companies, whether it's Hydro One or Meridian or Toronto Hydro. I think they would have a marketing plan there to give people some marketing choices. I think that would be good.

Direct Energy is generally in support of the bill. That's good to hear. They note that because the electricity prices are regulated by the province—and this is important because, really, the Ontario Energy Board regulates the price—these retailers are sort of hedging against future price changes. But the most part of the bill is not regulated by these retailers—the debt retirement charge, the delivery charge and the line loss charge. Those are three charges in the bill that many of the consumers don't look at.

Line loss is when the dispatcher, OPG, shoots out electricity across the grid—they fire out one kilowatt of energy, they get paid for it, but by the time it gets to your house, there's only half left. There's a 10% to 15% line loss on electricity. That's the line loss charge. You'll see a charge on your bill: It's 0.00123 or 0.00145 or something like that. The consumer is actually paying it. To get this electricity to you, they had to dispatch more energy than you actually use, so you have to pay for it. That makes sense, I guess.

The other one is the debt retirement charge, and it's called the provincial benefit. Now that's really an important issue. For small business that has gone into setting up conservation and load management within their facility—there's one in my riding. I'll mention the name. It's Bowmanville. It's a foundry, and they have smelters that are electrical. They set up their whole operation to be off-peak so that they'd get a lower distribution rate. Now that they've done all this and put in some modernization and tooling and stuff like that, their provincial benefit charge has gone up. In fact, I've written to Mr. Duguid, who—prior to that, I think it was George Smitherman. There have been so many different Ministers of Energy over there. I think they should put Mr. Wilkinson in that job, because he has been a pretty good minister. He's done a great job of selling the HST.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: And it's hard to sell.

Mr. John O'Toole: You can't sell that. That's like trying to push a rope uphill.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: He's telling the truth.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm not buying it. That's one thing we're not buying on this side. It's a shell game.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, perhaps you could—they're yelling at me now.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Often that just ignites the flames, so you want to be quiet on that one.

I think the stranded debt issue is something that many consumers ask all of us. There's the Ontario electricity financing authority—look on the public accounts, look online, look in the budget. If you look under that, you'll see that the total amount of debt owed by what was the old Ontario Hydro is around \$17 billion. It's going down, but—each of us pay 0.07 cents per kilowatt hour of debt retirement charge. On your bill, you'll see it. That's what it's for. My question to the Minister of Energy, and perhaps his parliamentary assistant in the response could tell us, is when is that debt going to be paid?

0930

It's just another tax. Where did it come from? I'm wandering around here a bit. This is very important. If you want the history of this, Mr. Speaker—you've been here longer than I have—you would know that the NDP, when it was under Bob Rae, got into trouble on electricity—a lot of trouble. Energy went to about 12 cents a kilowatt hour. They finally froze it. Once they froze it, costs kept going up and they created a great amount of debt.

There was a lot of debt created when they built the nuclear plants. What happened is that they looked at—

Hon. John Wilkinson: It was all spent in your riding.

Mr. John O'Toole: Do you know who did the report? It was Donald Macdonald, Pierre Elliott Trudeau's finance commissioner. That's who did the report—great guy. He did a great report; it was called the MacDonald commission. What he did is he looked at the amount of assets that old Ontario Hydro had and the amount of liabilities it had. What it did is, it apportioned a certain amount of assets—

Hon. John Wilkinson: In Durham region.

Mr. John O'Toole: Generating facilities generally—Niagara Falls and some of the coal and gas and other fossil fuel plants—and then they said, "You can take on a certain amount of debt." Then they took the transmission, which used to be part of it, and made it Hydro One. They allocated a certain amount of capital and a certain amount of debt to Hydro One, and that's why this debt retirement charge is left over. It was stranded debt that no one could pay. The assets would not support the amount of debt, and it was just poorly managed until we got in there and tried to sort this out. I think it's being worked on. I'd say the government is following our advice quite well.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, they haven't changed a thing. Have they deamalgamated Toronto? I don't think so. You guys haven't changed as much as you think.

But I do believe this: We've all agreed to getting rid of these retailers at the front door. In my final—I might seek more time here because I'm not going to have enough time to finish all my arguments.

I know the Minister of Revenue mentioned a specific case, and I do sympathize. It's just energy that he—he should check some of his BlackBerry records or maybe phone records. Maybe he got a call from a retailer on his BlackBerry and accepted the call. As such, that would be the first step in a contract, a contractual relationship where someone phones you, you answer the phone and say, "Yes." It could be implied that you've actually accepted the dialogue, that you're somehow engaged here.

I would say that these collection agencies are another whole deal, but I'm happy to say that they have increased the claims limit in Small Claims Court. Some of this stuff should be settled in civil court, I believe—some of these untoward agencies.

There are a couple of other things here, because I have read the bill, actually. It's in the section here that I'm talking about: "The bill amends the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998." That's section 3 here. It's in the section under the explanatory notes. Here is what it says: "The minister may issue cabinet approved directives to the board in relation to retailing of gas and electricity and the board shall implement the directives."

Let's face it; let's be clear here: The Minister of Energy is running it. In fact, Mr. Duguid is running it on behalf of the Premier, because they know that energy, whether it's oil—read the books on peak oil. Prices are going up. They're not going down; they are going up. I'm forecasting now—if you look at Bill 150, the Green Energy Act, I'm surprised people in Ontario aren't catching on to this stuff. Here's what they're doing. I like the sound of wind energy. I like—well, no, I don't; it's a low-decibel noise. Solar energy: They're paying these generators 80 cents a kilowatt hour. Wait a minute. How can you pay someone 80 cents to generate it and the consumer is only paying five cents? What's going on here? What's the average price of electricity? It's about five and a half cents per kilowatt hour. How can you pay for wind energy at 20 cents a kilowatt hour under a standard offer under Bill 150, on a feed-in tariff? They call it a FIT.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Thirteen cents.

Mr. John O'Toole: Let's say it's 15 cents. How can you pay them 15 cents and be charging the consumer five cents? That's not fair. In fact, no, you should pay the price for what it is. I'm all for it, but we'll find out how many people want to buy 80-cent energy.

They always refer to Denmark. Do you know what the average price of energy in Denmark is? Thirty-four cents a kilowatt hour. So no wonder people conserve. They can't afford it. That's why they're conserving.

I think there's a lot of good in this bill and it's the first step to getting it right, but I'll tell you, be prepared. The consumers of Ontario, I put to you now: Solar power is about 50 cents a kilowatt hour; wind is about 15 cents a

kilowatt hour. These contracts are going to be honoured. They're standard offer contracts. They're outside the grid price, and you're paying for it in the taxes. We're doing things in Ontario that I don't think are fair to the consumer because, as I said, electricity is a non-discretionary consumption. In other words, you have to eat to live and all those things take energy. So you're going to pay more and you're going to use less.

This bill only helps the guy knocking on your door bothering you to sign a contract. Why are people wanting to sign these contracts? Because they find the price of energy exorbitant. I can't blame all of that on the Premier, but I'd like to. There's a time and a place but I'm waiting to see if anyone has a response to this. I've run out of time to make any more substantive arguments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to say how touched I have been by the remarks made by the member of Durham. His concern for tenants is good and I think it's due to political corrections. You know how there are market corrections in the system? Political corrections are equally good. When you're moved away from government and are in opposition, you learn so much more. You learn to worry about people, as the member from Durham is expressing his concern for tenants, and this is good. That's what I call political correction. How long the political correction takes is hard to say, but in some cases it takes a long time.

But I could see how much learning there is in many of the members of the Conservative Party. Remember, and I will speak to this briefly as I speak next, that this is the party that deregulated the market. Of course, the Liberals are continuing with that deregulated market and are trying to correct it seven and a half years later, and to the extent that this little correction is coming, it's a good thing. But mostly, this was to simply say thanks to the member of Durham for worrying about many of the tenants.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 235. I think when you see a bill like this, the Energy Consumer Protection Act, you realize that it's not a philosophical bill; it very much is a sort of operational bill that's going to protect—it's a practical bill. It's going to help people in their homes. It's going to help ordinary and everyday individuals deal with what has become an increasing problem.

I think those problems have been outlined quite well by the previous speakers, but certainly you've seen in the past three years that retailers of energy have cracked the top 10 list of consumer complaints that are currently received by the Ministry of Consumer Services, and there's a number of problems that go along with that. Those problems include salespersons' practices; there's a lack of consumer information; there are some language barriers that need to be overcome. Often they try to do the business over the phone, obviously, and it's a verbal con-

tract that ends up being entered into. That's just not good enough for this type of an arrangement. Consumers often feel pressured into signing these agreements.

So for all these problems that have been brought forward by people over the years, we have solutions that are contained in this bill. If this bill receives the support of the House, consumers in Ontario will receive the protection they need. That also extends into things like suite metering, into consumer security deposits, into disconnection fees as well, so all the everyday issues that ordinary Ontarians face when they deal with an energy retailer over the changing electricity market are going to be included in this bill, with the intent of protecting the consumer. That's what I was trying to say at the start, that it appears this bill is going to receive support from the House. I think that's a good thing, because I think consumer protection crosses party lines. This bill deserves the support of all members.

0940

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to commend my colleague the member for Durham for speaking this morning on short notice and expounding eloquently on the subject that he did, on Bill 235. Certainly it is our intention to support this bill in principle.

The member, in his comments, talked about wind energy, and I wanted to inform the House of a proposal for a wind farm in the Belwood area of my riding, proposed by Inver Energy Canada. They're proposing to build between 25 and 35 wind turbines, and of course they are seeking approval under the process set out by the Green Energy Act, which is a bill that I actually voted against.

I had a meeting with some of my constituents on Friday, people who are in the vicinity of this area, in Centre Wellington, and people in East Garafraxa township, who are very, very concerned about this proposal and concerned about the health impacts. I think it's fair to say that we don't have a complete and full understanding of what the health impacts might be. Certainly the government seems to be interested in studying that subject. I would suggest that they would be prudent not to proceed with the massive expansion of wind energy without a full and complete understanding of what the potential health impacts might be.

I also received an e-mail from one of my constituents and I'd like to inform the House of it. It's from Janet Vallery, and it reads as follows: "Under the Liberal Green Energy Act the government has eliminated public process to participate in approvals. Companies applying for wind farms only require approval from REA"—renewable energy approval—"at the Ministry of the Environment and Ontario Power Authority. This is not a democratic public process and threatens all rural communities who happen to be located in a wind area. I would go further to say the Liberals have now made Ontario rural families second-class citizens with no property rights."

She goes on to say that the people in the area are meeting with local politicians, who are currently moving forward: "We've requested Centre Wellington and Wellington county council [to] sign the moratorium against wind farm development."

I want to encourage the members of the Legislature to think about those issues and respond accordingly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Mr. Rick Johnson: It's a pleasure to rise this morning and make some comments here. The member from Trinity-Spadina spoke eloquently about it, as well as the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, and of course my friend from Durham.

The intent of this bill, as we all know, is to protect consumers from unfair practices of gas marketers and energy retailers. My office has received a number of contacts from consumers and residents in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock who have signed contracts and basically been taken advantage of.

I think we are trying to strike a fair balance between protecting consumers' rights and allowing businesses the opportunity to provide consumers with energy options. If passed, this legislation will empower our consumers. We look forward to further consultations with our residents on this. It's taken a bold step for our government to step up to the plate on this issue and make sure that the issues are properly addressed. It's all about protecting the consumer when they come to the door.

Regarding the smart meters, when it comes in for apartment buildings and everyone, it's really going to allow us to look at where we use our energy, how we use our energy, and to use it smartly. I'm hopeful, in my house, that, first off, the kids will shower at a different time of the day, which will cut down on the use of the water tank and the energy used. I think it will lead to conservation, and anything we can do to help preserve our electrical use and energy consumption will be a good thing.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Durham, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to thank the members who responded, from Trinity-Spadina, Oakville, Wellington-Halton Hills and Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. And, yes, I think we're all onside on this.

I want to put on the record here an e-mail, which I think is in the public domain, from two of my constituents, Peter and Christine Box:

"As an apartment dweller in your constituency I am interested in the above subject inasmuch as how it will affect me financially once the proposed legislation is implemented.

"The legislation seems to concentrate more on the time of use rather than the efficiency of use and when you are in an apartment with no dishwasher and no washer/dryer I can't see where timing can have any great effect.

"Most of the use of hydro in an apartment is determined by the landlord inasmuch as he supplies the stove/fridge/water heater and at the lowest cost/least efficient.

"He also controls the efficiency of the windows, doors and insulation. Where is the benefit to the tenant....

"I see in one of the government sites there is a list of foreseeable problems and possible solutions.

"One of them addresses some of these problems and the solution suggested is to make landlords comply with certain standards on windows and suites....

"(1) What are 'certain standards'?

"(2) If the landlord is made to comply and spend money upgrading can they not then turn around and complain they have been forced to spend money," which will affect my rent itself? My rent will be increased.

"I trust you will look into this and provide"—I have written to Mr. Duguid, the minister on this, and I think it's worthy to look at income consistency. If you look at the implementation of the HST, it's another 8% on essential consumption. In British Columbia, which is also implementing the HST, they're not applying the HST on gasoline. I'm encouraging the ministry to look at people with fragile incomes in this fragile economy. We each have a social and a collective responsibility to be making sure we're not leaving people behind in this very tough economy.

We'll be supporting the bill, but let's not assume that smart meters are smart; they're time-of-use meters.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to Bill 235, and I want to say it is timely. It's about time. After seven years of complaints that we have all heard in our ridings about energy retailers who often come around to your door with misleading information that entraps people into contracts they simply, in the end, cannot afford, I say, it's time.

Every MPP in this Legislature comes with a story, a horror story, including the Minister of Energy, where he reads a case that has happened to him. It's instructive how it can happen to anyone. Errors can happen to anyone and misleading information can be given to anybody. People can buy into contracts that are not right. It happens to many people, but particularly to the most vulnerable in Ontario.

Seniors are particularly fragile and can be easily tempted into buying into a contract that they think is going to save them a few dollars. People who don't understand the language can be easily taken in by misleading information from energy salespeople who come to your door, telling you you're going to save money, and in the end, you don't.

The stories are many. We've had this ever since the market was deregulated many, many years ago by the Conservative government. So this is timely because, if nothing else, it's going to help some people for sure.

But I've got to tell you, there are many people in Ontario like myself who long for the good old days of

Consumers' Gas. Many, many people in my riding and others who I know long for the good old days of Consumers' Gas, when they could call just one number and get the service that they desperately needed. They would come and the repairs would happen. The reliability of service was there; the charges were predictable, affordable and reasonable. That ended many, many years ago when my friends to the right of my right decided that deregulation was the way to go and they had to emulate Alberta, their close cousins politically, who had deregulated the market. They too felt that the time was right to put hydro on the spot market, which we have been suffering through for many, many years. I'm telling you, there are a whole lot of people who are looking forward to the day when government will have the power, the fortitude to come back and say, "We're going to re-regulate the market and bring back the good old days of Consumers' Gas."

0950

While some of these measures seem to be helpful and seem to be going in the right direction, nothing short of re-regulation could solve the problem—nothing short. I am one of those old soldiers that wishes that we could go back to those good old days. If truth be told, I'm sure there are many Liberal MPPs who would probably say the same thing but dare not because they can't, including many of the Conservative Party who probably feel the same way but cannot because, ideologically, to do so would be to go against the current leader and the former leader of the Conservative Party.

But we don't have that luxury. We don't have the freedom or the pleasure to be able to say, "We're going to go in this direction. Let's push in that direction." Unfortunately, what we're stuck with is a government who says, "We're going to take some corrective actions to help the consumer because we've been hearing from them for the last 10 years and we've got to do something." So it's better than nothing.

They are going to bring in some protections. For those who feel pressured into signing a contract, the bill proposes three alternatives: a 10-day cooling-off period; upon third party verification within 10 to 60 days of signing the contract; and 30 days after the receipt of the first bill. This is better than what we had before. It's very useful to bring in something that is a little more effective than what we have.

Whether that will solve the problem for those who have literacy issues in the home, for those who don't realize that the new law is there, that they have different measures to grab at as a way of helping them, and whether it will help the majority of citizens who will not have a clue about the changes of the law, I don't know. It will help middle-class professionals who have access to the Web, who are able to use Google and get this information within minutes. It will help those who have the literacy to be able to get that information. This is true, and that is good. But I still maintain that the majority of people will not have a clue about the changes to the law that are being proposed, that are likely to pass, and will continue to suffer the problems that they will face at the door.

They will add additional licensing conditions for retailers—will that help? I don't know—including individual salesperson training and background checks. Okay, they're going to have a background check. I'm not sure what that will determine, what the particular elements of that will be, how it will be able to spot a miscreant, a bad salesperson who they're going to be able to figure out by their training shouldn't be there. I don't know how they're going to be able to do that, but that's what they propose.

An insurance fund to assist in covering potential losses for consumers—very useful.

The Ontario Energy Board will randomly audit retailers—better than nothing. It's better than not to audit retailers at all. Anything is better than what we had, so even a random audit is something more than what we will have had in the past.

Improved officer and director accountability: That's to be determined by regulation. We don't know what that means.

Unfair cancellation policies and fees, automatic renewals for gas contracts: The government proposes that it will prevent excessive cancellation fees or, in some instances, any fees such as when people move or accidentally sign a second contract, and they will eliminate negative option renewals. That is good. But much of what they say by way of what they're proposing is going to be in regulation, and we'll have to see what they propose in regulation to determine whether or not what they recommend is, indeed, going to be effective.

So on the whole issue of marketers, any effort to stop misleading sales of energy contracts at the door, in my view, is going to be a positive step in the right direction. But I look forward to deputations coming to committee; I really do. I'm looking forward to the Advocacy Centre for Tenants and other groups, such as the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. There are many different groups that will be representing tenants, which I think will bring to the table a lot of concerns that the government may not have yet heard, and if they haven't heard them, hopefully they will have their ears open to the suggestions as a way of improving this.

There are questions of submetering that we have. I believe that the Advocacy Centre for Tenants and the other group that I mentioned, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, have raised concerns. I want to raise a couple, and they relate to submetering.

The sub-metering protections only happen to sitting tenants. Those who are willing to have them, presumably they understand what they're getting into and presumably it's something they want. But because of vacancy decontrol, it means that the people who are coming into the apartment have no control whatsoever about what they're getting into. In fact, vacancy decontrol often means that if that person was paying that much rent, as soon as you leave, when the new person comes in, the landlord can charge what they want. That's what vacancy decontrol is all about, and it's going to hurt them. It has been hurting a lot of tenants ever since the law was changed by the

Tories and continued by the Liberals. As it relates to the protections, the new people coming in will not have any say whatsoever. That's something that I suspect people that are coming to depute will speak to. I think that is a concern. How the government intends to deal with that is beyond me. My suspicion is that they don't intend to deal with it, but we'll wait and see.

Landlords' obligations concerning necessary retrofits are not clear at the present. Those obligations would likely only extend to current sitting tenants. This means that tenants will potentially face higher fees due to factors entirely within the landlords' control, which in turn will affect the tenants' ability to pay.

There are other concerns that tenants have. Tenants still pay for common-area energy use in their rent. They have no control over reduction of energy use in common areas. I don't believe that the government has thought about the implications of that. How are they dealing with common areas? Common areas are beyond the control of individual tenants but they're still going to be paying. This particular bill does not deal with common areas and does not deal with the effects this will have on tenants and their ability to pay.

Load-shifting, something that the member from Durham was talking about, typically involves using appliances such as dishwashers, washers and dryers during mid- or off-peak pricing periods. The problem is that most tenants do not have these appliances in their suites, and so they have absolutely no control.

It's instructive, because the member from Durham was reading a letter in his last two minutes in which a tenant was talking about how many of the things that affect the hydro prices are not within their control. The lady or the man that sent that letter was talking about, "We don't control the quality of the windows. We don't control the quality of the doors. We don't control insulation—no insulation or bad insulation. We don't control, indeed, the appliances" that I just mentioned.

So this will affect tenants in a serious way. And while the government says that the landlords are required to meet certain energy efficiency standards for appliances in suites, we don't know what that means because that has yet to be determined by regulation. Unless we have a sense of what that is going to be, we don't know how tenants are going to be affected.

1000

The most dramatic thing for me, which I think the member from Durham was getting at as well, is that over 30% of Ontario tenant households live at or below the poverty line, so any increase in shelter costs, including those costs associated with utilities, has a disproportionate impact on these low-income households. This is a serious matter.

Homeowners earn, I believe, twice the amount of money than those who live in private rental housing. The majority of people barely make ends meet. Some struggle. So when the government says, "We're going to introduce a harmonized sales tax," that harmonized sales tax is going to add an extra \$225 a year for tenants. It may

not sound like much to those who earn over \$100,000, but tenants who live in private rental households, who only earn \$30,000, \$35,000, \$40,000, are going to be seriously affected by that extra \$225 they're going to have to pay because of the introduction of the harmonized sales tax.

We raised that question yesterday. We went through the freedom-of-information request to try to ask how much it's going to cost people for the additional 8% retail sales tax on utilities. It took eight long months to get that information—eight long months, as if somehow there was a great deal of secrecy attached to it. The government did its very best to delay and obstruct the opposition parties from getting that information. Eight long months—I don't get it.

If you're proud of your harmonized tax, just go out and defend it. Continue to defend it. Be aggressive about it. If the members of the opposition want the information, why take so long to give it to them? There is no overriding privacy interest. If you're proud of your harmonized sales tax, be aggressive, go out and defend everything. Don't obstruct the opposition parties as you've been doing for years and months when they are requesting to get that information.

We also made a request to find out how much it will cost drivers, with the additional harmonized sales tax, for gasoline. We can't get that information. For some reason, with this particular government there's a great deal of privacy. Why so much privacy on the issue? I just don't get it. This additional cost is going to hurt.

We talked about two major issues that I am convinced are going to make for instructive deputations. One is whether or not we're cracking down sufficiently on energy retailers, and whether or not the government is interested in re-regulating the market. It is my profound hope that deputations that will come forward are going to be calling for bringing back Consumers' Gas, having one regulator of the market, one provider of hydro as opposed to the many different providers of a deregulated market that the Conservatives brought in many years ago. That will be one question.

The other question is, what kinds of regulations are we likely to see this government introduce that are going to bring the protections that the Ontario Energy Board said we need to bring in to protect tenants, particularly those who are most vulnerable; and, third, the issues of sub-metering and how that will affect many of the tenants who live in private rental households, and how that will affect particularly those who are most vulnerable.

I look forward to the hearings. I look forward to the member from Brant being sincere, as he said he will be, in his comments about how responsive he will be to the deputants. Hopefully, he will be true to his word because I suspect a lot of advocacy groups are going to come forward, stating a lot of concerns that they will have, and if they haven't yet heard them, that they will consider them at the time of the hearings.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: The member from Trinity–Spadina has left me with a small challenge, and I'll take that challenge up: to confirm one more time that indeed, as his concerns have been laid out, I've made that commitment to him and to the House. I've made that commitment in the past and I believe I have a record that fulfills that whenever I was a parliamentary assistant. I believe I have a spotless record when it comes to amendments. We did find some amendments and we did work with the opposition when I was the parliamentary assistant previous. We did find ways to make the bill better, and that would be my intent. So I recommit myself for a third time to the minister—to the member from Trinity–Spadina—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I don't mind being a minister.

Mr. Dave Levac: You don't want to be a minister.

But let me comment quickly on the aspect of the bill that the member talks about. He does speak about specifics that can be done inside, and will be done with other aspects of other ministries, actually, regarding the building code and upkeep of the tenants' facilities. There are opportunities for us to use federal and provincial programs that are already in existence to upgrade an awful lot of the areas of apartment buildings and single-family dwellings to do that.

We are in a culture of conservation regarding energy. We are learning how to conserve energy and we are starting programs and have programs that are always in existence, that continue to get us to a better place when it comes to using energy. I don't think there's anyone in the House that will not agree that Canada, just as much as Ontario, has been well known for not being very good at conserving energy. We are getting much better but we've got a long way to go. So this is one of those areas in which I believe we are finding commonality.

The last comment to you is that this is a consumer protection bill, that's what we're trying to accomplish, and I'm sure that we're going to be able to reach that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always interesting and challenging to reply to the minister—or the member, rather, from Trinity–Spadina—

Mr. Dave Levac: We all want him to be a minister.

Mr. John O'Toole: —who used to be a minister and now doesn't want to be a minister; there's too much responsibility that goes with it. Because when he was in government, that's when they implemented the social contract, something they didn't want to do but had to do. I always admire the eloquence of his remarks.

But we are on the record of being in support of this Bill 235 with respect to the provisions of the retailers coming and knocking on your door, wanting to see your bill and charge you more. What we have concerns with—and I raised it on behalf of my constituent and the member from Trinity–Spadina referenced it, and I'd be happy to share this e-mail with him from my constituent who is concerned about the sub-metering provisions in this Bill 235—and that's to deal with the smart meters.

Again, I want to repeat they are not smart meters, they are time-of-use meters and they allow the utility to bill you three different rates: on-peak, off-peak and high-peak. These rates, if you pay about five cents a kilowatt hour now, at the top of peak you're going to pay almost 10 cents. The energy costs are going to double. The question was raised yesterday by your leader, Andrea Horwath, about the implications of the HST on electricity. It's going to cost \$225 a year, per person, more in HST for natural gas and electricity. When you look at this thing and you factor in the smart meter and the time-of-use provisions under the regulations, I put to you and to Mr. Levac from Brant, who is an excellent member, that to the people on fixed incomes who often live in apartments or in less—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I listened to the member from Trinity–Spadina for roughly 18 minutes. He spoke about many different elements about energy consumption in the province of Ontario and raised many different concerns, and rightly so, I guess, as he's in the position to raise questions. I think we as a government—I listened to the PA for the minister, the member from Brant, speak about the process.

You know, all the bills, all recommendations proposed in this place take a chance and go to committee, and those committees travel the province of Ontario. We listen to many stakeholders, consumers and many people to give us advice and raise their concerns in order to enhance the bill and make it a good bill.

1010

The most important thing in this bill talks about consumer protections, because all of us from across the province of Ontario heard about the stories. Every riding, every constituency office, received many different complaints from constituents about people knocking on their door, signing a contract, and they cannot get out of this contract. So many different parts and elements of this contract are hidden and they don't understand. They're stuck with the contract, and in the end, if they want to get out of it, they pay a high price.

That's why this bill came, to protect those consumers across the province of Ontario: to make the act and make those contracts very simple, using simple language so that people can understand it, and also get the chance, if they don't understand it the first time, to get out of the contract within 10 to 60 days or 30 days after paying the first bill.

It's very important to focus on the issues which this bill is trying to do in the province to create some kind of protection mechanism for the people across the province of Ontario who were victims in the past of many different people knocking on their doors and forcing them to sign a contract they don't want.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I was listening to the member for Trinity–Spadina. I'm sure he's well aware that

this bill is for the protection of our consumers. At the present time, we know all those retailers that are knocking on doors are not really telling the truth to the consumers. I had, just this morning here, because people must be watching the debate, this lady Nathalie who is writing me, sending me a note saying that I have to call her back., She signed a contract at 7.99 cents. She did the calculation. It comes up to over 11 cents a kilowatt hour. This is the approach they are using. They are trying to convince people that they will be paying less money when they sign a contract. That is completely, completely false. Every one of them—I get at least one call a day from people who have signed contracts, and I'm able to work with most of them to get them cancelled because they are not telling the truth to the people. Very often they sign the contract for them, so they're forging the signature. Myself, they told me that I had signed for my company. I immediately called a lawyer. The lawyer told me, "You've got to see the police." I got the OPP to investigate that. We had 23 of those in my area that forged the signature.

I'd just like to go back to what my friend from Durham was saying. It's true: We have a debt of over around \$17 billion at the present time. But let me tell you, why do we have that debt? At one time, December 2002, we were paying \$1.33 per kilowatt hour and the government was charging the people 4.3 cents.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Trinity-Spadina has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to thank the members from Brant and Durham for referring to me as a minister. I'm looking forward to that, actually, in the next election. It would be something that I could handle. Twenty years later it would be a lot easier than it was.

Second point: The members from London-Fanshawe and Glengarry-Prescott-Russell make a strong case for re-regulating the market. I agree. I think you probably liked the system as we had it when you were in government many, many years ago and when we were in government in 1990. We had one provider of the service, Consumers' Gas. I think that is the argument I made earlier and that I believe you're trying to make as well: The abuses have happened so frequently against consumers for so long that something has to be done. Whether or not the suggestions you are making in this bill are adequate to curb the abuses by retailers remains to be seen, but that action has to be taken is a must, and I agree with that.

That's why I put to you, are you interested in re-regulating the market? Because that would be the ultimate way of solving it; that's what I put to you. But I'm not sure I heard any of the Liberal members speak to that particular issue at all. You stand up and say, "We need to help the consumers"—and I agree with that, of course, but I put the ultimate test to you: What about re-regulation?

By the way, member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, the debt that we have on energy has to do with nu-

clear. You'll remember Darlington: It cost us \$15 billion or \$16 billion. We're still paying for that today. That's why we have that debt, not because of any other reason.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, it's true. I wanted to remind you of that.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): This House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Our family are avid campers, and we've gone from tents to a fifth wheel that the kids call the travelling cottage. So I'm really pleased to welcome to the Legislature today Camping in Ontario and the Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association, who are in our east gallery.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to introduce some guests in the west gallery who have come a long way to see us today: Denis Bideri from the World Vision Rwanda program; Didan Rwabika, youth ambassador from Rwanda; Rachel Makege, the youth ambassador from Tanzania; Max Seunik, Canadian youth ambassador; and the chaperones Henry Vanderspek, Alex Sancton and Ellen Kuschnik from my constituency office.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to introduce my guests in the west members' gallery: Paul Bradbury, Rosalind Cameron, Moe Horenfeldt and Marlene Horenfeldt, all from the region of York.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to welcome in our members' gallery Rudy and Marie Cuzzeto and their children Michael and Joey. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Joining us shortly in the gallery will be the grades 4 and 5 classes from St. Paul school in my constituency.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure to introduce Councillor John Phair from the town of Petrolia, joining us in the members' gallery today.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce Emily Reid—she may already have been introduced—from Camping in Ontario; as well as Roland Goreski, who's the general manager of Campkin's from my riding, involved in that industry. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'm delighted to introduce to you a delegation from the People's Republic of China, specifically from Anqing province. They're being led by Mr. Fang Zuzhong, vice-chairman of the standing committee of the Anqing local people's congress. They're being joined by a committee of the National Congress of Chinese Canadians and Mr. Shu King Kong.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Scarborough Centre and page Julia Louis, to welcome her father, Hani Louis, to Queen's Park today.

As well, on behalf of the member from Barrie and page Christopher Parker, I'd like to welcome mother

Michelle Parker and father Al Parker to Queen's Park today. Welcome, all.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Acting Premier. How many manufacturing jobs in Ontario have been lost since you took office?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Regrettably, in the last year, there have been some 252,000 job losses in the manufacturing sector, which is far too many. There have been job losses in Michigan, Ohio and across most manufacturing jurisdictions. That is precisely why, working with the federal government, we have put together a comprehensive tax package that will create, according to the Conservative Party's expert witness, some 600,000 net new jobs over the next 10 years.

Jobs and employment continue to be a major issue. Your party and your leader have said nothing about how to deal with this world crisis. We have laid out a plan. We will build on that plan as we move forward. We have taken the tough choices that will get this economy and get those unemployed people back to work in meaningful, good-paying jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: You can project any number of jobs that you want in a perfect world at some point in time, but let's look at the facts.

According to Statistics Canada, Dalton McGuinty has lost almost 280,000 well-paid, full-time manufacturing jobs since taking office. How many of those jobs did Dalton McGuinty lose before the recession even began?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What Statistics Canada said is that the Canadian manufacturing sector, like the world sector, has had a massive restructuring and seen job loss across the western world. So I would caution the member about interpreting what Stats Canada says. What Stats Canada has also said is that since June of last year, we've seen a net increase in manufacturing jobs.

That being said, we have lost far too many jobs. Far too many families in this province are struggling not only with job loss but job uncertainty. That's why we've laid out a plan to create jobs. That's why we've said what we need to do. That party and her leader have no answer, except to go back to a long past era that this province rejected in 2003. Give us a plan, give us an alternative, and lay off—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Obscured in all of this rhetoric, what this government does not want to talk about is the fact that 206,000 full-time manufacturing jobs were lost in Ontario under this government before the recession even began. When Dalton McGuinty is reminded of

the facts, he calls it "fun with numbers." There's nothing fun about 206,000 Ontario families without a paycheque.

Here's another important fact: Between 1995 and 2003, Ontario PC governments created over 200,000 manufacturing jobs. Then Dalton McGuinty came along and cancelled the tax cuts, implemented a health tax, raised corporate taxes, is raising sales tax, increased red tape and implemented a crippling energy policy.

Why did Dalton McGuinty abandon Ontario families who make their living in the manufacturing sector?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I know a lot of people who've lost their jobs in my riding, and I think they see through the shallowness of that rhetoric. They recognize that the world economy took an enormous downturn in 2008. They recognize that it happened in Michigan and Ohio.

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: And they can yell and shout—but we have acknowledged that. We have said that that crisis is an enormous challenge for our families and those families who have lost jobs or seen their jobs threatened. But we have taken the right steps to create jobs. That has been endorsed even by their own expert witness. And, I might point out to the members opposite, working with the federal government, working with the people in Ottawa who get it around tax reform and the need for job creation, we have taken the right steps—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again to the Acting Premier, a simple question: How many long-term-care beds have you created since you took office?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think by any measure we have really invested in long-term care in this province. We're really committed to providing high-quality care for those who need long-term care.

One of the real successes of our government, I think, is the quality of care. The Ontario Health Quality Council will measure and publicly report health outcomes and satisfaction for the first time starting this fall.

We're working with partners in the sector to implement the recommendations in the Sharkey report to improve the quality of care. We're rebuilding 35,000 beds over the next 10 years. We've begun that process now. That's more than half the homes in this province.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I didn't hear a number there. I'll take it that the answer is none.

Between 1995 and 2003—again, let's look at the facts—Ontario PC governments created—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Please continue.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Between 1995 and 2003, Ontario PC governments created 20,000 new long-term-care

beds and refurbished 16,000 more. We prepared for this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The clock is stopped.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ministers of Education and Economic Development and Community Safety.

Please continue.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: We created spaces across the province, and the McGuinty Liberals have closed emergency rooms, long-term-care beds and clinics in the Ottawa area, like Bruyère Continuing Care, Ottawa Hospital and Cornwall Community Hospital. You've also made cuts to Douglas Memorial in Fort Erie and the Burk's Falls and District Health Centre.

You're spending a record amount of money. Why are you incapable of creating new long-term-care beds?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think that the question demonstrates how terribly out of touch members of the opposition party are.

I'm very, very happy to tell you that we've opened almost 8,000 new long-term-care beds, and I want to remind the member opposite that our 2009 budget commits to adding another 2,000 beds in 10 communities across this province by 2010.

In my home community of London, we're adding 600 new beds. I'm not talking about redeveloped beds; I'm talking about new beds. In Thunder Bay, 132 new supportive units. Across this province, people are benefiting from the increase in the number of long-term-care beds. We are also expanding the continuum of supports available so that people can stay in their homes longer.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: If you give a Conservative \$1 billion, you get 20,000 new long-term-care beds. If you give a Liberal \$1 billion, you get eHealth. And who knows how much more the 14 LHINs are wasting on sweetheart deals with the same Liberal-friendly consultants from the eHealth boondoggle. You boast you'll be spending—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The noise is coming from both sides of the House, honourable member from Renfrew.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Especially from—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. John Yakabuski: She's been told so many times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't need the help from the member from Renfrew.

I've tried very hard not to be warning members and turfing members out, but if we're going to persist, I'm going to have to get to that point.

Please continue.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: This government's boasting that they'll spend \$42 billion this year on health care, but what difference does it make when most of the money ends up lining the pockets of your consultant friends rather than on direct, front-line patient care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I just am astounded by the question. I will line up our record on health care against their record on health care any day of the week.

When we were elected in 2003, we were on the brink of moving into a two-tier health care system because the system was simply not being supported.

Almost 900,000 more people have access to primary health care than they did when we took office. By 2013, we will have doubled the number of new doctors graduating each year. We will have doubled the number of new doctors graduating next year. There are now 2,300 more doctors practising in this province than there were just six years ago.

Family health teams are a huge success for us. The New England Journal of Medicine has praised—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. We learned yesterday that Ontarians will pay an extra \$225 each year to heat their homes and keep their lights on, thanks to this government's HST scheme. Also yesterday, consumers were warned that they should expect gas prices to rise to \$1.12 a litre, and that's without the extra 8% HST. Can the Acting Premier tell us: How much more will the average family pay at the pumps as of July 1st?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: No, I can't. I'll give you a "for instance." When I filled up my tank two weeks ago, I paid 95 cents, and seven days later I paid 85 cents. It's varying up to 10 to 12 cents. I don't know the last time she went to a gas station, but I go to them at least once a week, and they are varying like that.

What I can tell her is that the tax package we put forward provides sales tax credits and personal tax cuts which will more than offset any additional expenditures that at least 93% of people have with respect to the implementation of our package, which will create 600,000 jobs. I would invite her to take the advice of Hugh Mackenzie and of the institute for policy alternatives: "Do the right thing—create jobs and lower taxes for Ontario's most vulnerable citizens." That's why your own supporters don't back you up.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: All I'd advise this minister to do is to actually listen to the people of this province. That's the advice that this government needs. We know very well that this government has the information. But

they've repeatedly rejected our freedom-of-information request asking for it. People have a right to know exactly how much extra they're going to be paying at the pumps. StatsCan reports that Ontario families already pay, on average, \$2,310 a year for gas. Simple math suggests that the HST will tack on an extra \$185 each and every year. Will the Acting Premier confirm this for us? Does the HST mean \$185 extra every year to fill up at the pumps?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No; absolutely not. What the member is doing is trying to take one part of the story. I would refer her to page 25 of Ontario's Tax Plan for Jobs and Growth, where it gives a very specific breakdown about how people of different incomes and different family situations will in fact benefit overall from our tax package.

We did consult Ontarians. We consulted anti-poverty groups. We consulted Hugh Mackenzie and other prominent New Democrats, who have all embraced the notion of lowering taxes to create jobs and, particularly, to lower taxes for Ontario's most vulnerable citizens through the Ontario child benefit, which she voted against, through the cuts to the lowest bracket of income.

This is about creating jobs. We have a plan. Every expert agrees it will create jobs. All they want to do is trade in tired rhetoric. We want to create jobs, and we will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: All the people of this province tell me they want and all New Democrats want is for this government to come clean. That's all we want. Yesterday the Minister of Revenue acknowledged that he has a breakdown of the government's revenues from the new tax on gas, on home heating and on everything else. But they've blocked our request seeking that very information. If the government is so confident that their HST scheme is a good one, then why are they hiding the information and refusing to tell Ontarians exactly how much they're going to be hosed at the pumps?

1050

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's in the budget. We laid out how much revenue the HST will collect. What the member forgets—and this is why, I think, many Ontarians are coming to be very skeptical and why Ontarians recognize how difficult this is. She doesn't talk about the sales tax credit; she doesn't talk about the personal income tax.

We put together a package—it's outlined in the budget—with three-year projections going forward. We updated that in the fall statement and we will update it again in the budget. It's all there for people to see and to make judgment on.

We are confident that a government that addresses the jobs challenge and the unemployed in northern Ontario, Windsor and across Ontario will see job growth, an improved economy and a better Ontario in the future because of the decisions we've taken today that address the employment challenges that she and her party refuse to address.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Acting Premier. On Monday, in response to a question on the Buy America trade deal, the Acting Premier quoted the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, but their reaction to the deal can be characterized as lukewarm at best. In fact, the CME is calling for continued discussions. Others just call it a bad deal.

Ontario has been asked to ratify this deal. Will this happen behind closed doors, or will the McGuinty government agree to public hearings so Ontarians know exactly what their government is getting them into this time?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very happy to speak about Buy America because this is a great-news story for Ontario and people who work in this province.

For many months we were very worried when the US started down this path of Buy America. Ontario was the lead in asking the federal government to do something about stopping this Buy America clause, so you can imagine that we were delighted, along with our partners—yes, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters being one of them—to ask, how can we work with our American counterparts to get rid of that clause?

I'm pleased to say that we had unprecedented support from coast to coast to work with our national colleagues to bring forward a solution which removes the Buy America package not just from the current economic stimulus package, but as well from future purchases at the state and federal level in the United States of America.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This deal has some serious implications for the province and for municipal governments, in terms of their ability to use public money to support Ontario jobs.

Critics of the deal say Canada gave American companies access to \$25 billion worth of Canadian contracts in exchange for Canadian suppliers getting a mere \$4 billion worth of American contracts. It's like selling the farm to buy a tractor.

Given the apparent imbalance, why isn't this government allowing the Legislature and the public to debate this deal?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think there are two key numbers to keep in mind: one is 10, and the other is 65. The \$10 billion represents what we across Canada, provincially, are prepared to offer in government procurement to our American colleague companies. The other number is 65, which is the access that our companies will have to \$65 billion worth of annual procurement from state levels in the US, and that's what's so important. Yes, what we are offering up is unprecedented; we hadn't done that before in government procurement at the state and, for a temporary period, municipal level.

What we get on an ongoing and annual basis is \$65 billion of access to government procurement. This is a

win for Ontario companies and it is a win for workers. That's why the CAW came into my office to get a personal briefing on the buy-America package, an offer that we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here are some of the possible impacts of the buy-America deal: It might prevent cities and towns from buying food from local farms and vehicles from local manufacturers, and it might restrict the province from sourcing medical equipment from Ontario's suppliers. In other words, it may take job-creating tools away from local governments in exchange for not very much at all.

If the McGuinty government is so sure that this is the right deal for Ontario, then why will they not, at the very least, agree to a full public debate?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I know you seem worried about the municipal reaction. The president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities says, "Canadians are fighting hard to recover from the recession.... Today's announcement gives them hope." In North Bay, they called the agreement "a spectacularly huge win."

Moreover, I would encourage the NDP to take us up on the offer to come in for a full briefing so we could give you the kind of detail so you too could be proud of the fact that workers want to work and that our companies here in Ontario want access to those contracts so that Ontario workers will work. I thought that's what the NDP wanted as well, but apparently we've been mistaken again.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the environment minister: Are you firing Ontario's Environmental Commissioner because he revealed Dalton McGuinty's climate change targets are nothing but hot air?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Well, you know, I can't believe this question. It's nice to get an environment question, by the way, because usually that party isn't interested in the environment at all.

First of all, Mr. Miller has done an outstanding job over the last 10 years, there's no question about it, and we appreciate his advice on an ongoing basis. But I think it's also fair to say that we want to have a transparent and open process. We all know that these appointments are for five years. We certainly ask anyone who may be interested in the job, including Mr. Miller, to go through the transparent process. Let's take a look at who's out there and interested in the job. Let's get the best-qualified person, who may very well be Mr. Miller. He has done an outstanding job and I'm sure that he will continue to contribute to the province of Ontario in the years ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, that's all well and good, but in his latest report the Environmental Commissioner exposed Dalton McGuinty's dirty secret: Greenhouse gas emissions have gone up and will keep going up under the

McGuinty Liberals. The commissioner says, "The fact that greenhouse gas emissions are projected to rise between 2014 and 2020 points to a serious deficiency in the government's planning."

Interjection: Shame.

Mr. Toby Barrett: That is shameful.

While your climate change guru, your Liberal friend Hugh MacLeod, was allowed to make a quiet exit, the commissioner joins the Ombudsman in being hung out to dry. Why does Dalton McGuinty dump everyone who criticizes him or holds him accountable?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Well, it is fascinating getting these kinds of questions from this member. If you're so much interested in climate change, why did you vote against the coal-fired energy plant closures? Why did every member in your caucus vote against the greenbelt? And I can think of so many other good, positive environmental initiatives that this government has brought along over the last six years.

We look forward to working with that member and his caucus to deal with the real environmental issues, which include climate change, and we look forward to working with Mr. Miller in whatever capacity he chooses and we choose as a result of the transparent process that we're involved in. But it's great to see you're finally interested in the environment, because that's quite a change from the usual attitude of the Conservative Party.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Your government has hired two controversy-ridden banks to advise on privatizing Ontario's assets. The first is Goldman Sachs, which admitted complicity in the great financial crisis and is currently embroiled in the Greek government's debt scandal; the second, CIBC, which just last month paid \$27 million to the Ontario Securities Commission for its role in the sale of sub-prime securities and which is deeply involved with the rail privatization scandal in BC. So we don't take your word for things being upfront when it comes to these kinds of deals.

Will the government table the tender documents for the services of these companies? And if not, why not?

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The government routinely employs the service of outside advisers who do these on a competitive basis on a variety of issues.

I should point out to the member that we are looking at our assets with respect to the proper management of those assets, going forward. This is something that governments routinely do. It is appropriate in the context of how capital is invested, how we're maximizing the return on those assets.

We look forward to continuing to do the kinds of research and background that will help the Legislature—and I say "the Legislature"—make more informed decisions as we move forward into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The minister and his boss consistently refuse to put on the table the documents that show whether or not Ontario is protected in its dealings with these controversy-ridden firms. Will this minister put on the table the contract with these two companies? If not, why not?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The government will continue to follow the procurement directives that have been agreed to and voted on by this Legislature. We will fulfill our obligations to that.

This is a government that has in fact done things like bringing Hydro One and OPG under freedom of information and has made a variety of other changes on our procurement practices that are designed to provide greater transparency and accountability.

It is important that from time to time in a competitive process, the government of Ontario look at assets and a variety of issues to ensure that we are in fact maximizing the support and the assets that we have in our quiver.

It's important that we continue to do that kind of due diligence in terms of assuring the taxpayers that the considerable sums of money they have invested in those assets are well invested.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Glen R. Murray: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, during question period the member for Parkdale—High Park made reference to an individual who wrote to your ministry, raising safety concerns about a workplace. The member claimed that the individual has yet to receive a response from your ministry regarding specific safety violations.

Minister, you have often stood up in the House and said that workplace health and safety is your number one priority. Would the minister be able to update the Legislature on this matter?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question. First of all, let me applaud the individual who wrote the Ministry of Labour to express his concerns around health and safety at this particular workplace. I appreciate the time that he took to make these concerns known to us. I want to reassure him and the member opposite that my ministry followed up on those concerns.

I've been advised that upon receiving the written letter, a ministry inspector visited the site and ensured compliance with the Occupational Health And Safety Act. The inspector spoke to property management regarding the safety issues raised in that letter. The inspector prepared a written field report and a copy was left with the workplace on November 3. I have also been advised that a letter will be sent to the individual who raised those concerns. Again, I thank him.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Minister, for your response. I am glad to hear that you followed up on the issue raised yesterday by my friend from Parkdale—High Park. More importantly, it is good to know that your

ministry staff has responded to the individual's concerns and have had inspectors visit the site.

It is also good that concerned citizens are actively engaged in the safety of Ontario workplaces. We all lead busy lives with various responsibilities. However, Ontarians are known to look out for one another. What else can our citizens be doing to help keep our workers safe?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, I thank the member for the question. My ministry has 430 inspectors who are out in the field every single day to ensure that our workplaces are kept safe. This is double the number of inspectors that we had in 2003.

But even with such a large team, our inspectors can't be everywhere at once. That's why I want to encourage all Ontarians to report any unsafe or questionable work-sites to the Ministry of Labour. We have a hotline set up for concerned citizens to call and report any health and safety concerns in Ontario's workplaces. That's 1-800-268-8013. You can also send a letter in to the Ministry of Labour with your concerns.

I can assure you that every issue about an Ontario workplace that is brought to our attention—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Attorney General. Your government counsel in a civil lawsuit settled over Christmas cross-examined an Ontario man about his decision to fly a Canadian flag in his yard. Your civil lawyer asked, and I quote, "Weren't you at all concerned about instigating a confrontation" by flying the flag, and later added, "I take it from your answer that you were not at all concerned about provoking a response."

This wasn't an arm's-length police officer or a prosecutor. This is your civil counsel. His instructions had to come from someone. Who instructed him to take the position that flying the Canadian flag in your own front yard is an act of provocation?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know we all stand as proud Canadians and proud Ontarians yesterday, today, tomorrow, forever.

I would suggest, respectfully, to the honourable member that he actually go back and take a look at the full court transcript. You know, things taken out of context always have a different flavour than when they are seen in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It really doesn't assist anybody in any way to start picking and poking at a word or two from lengthy court proceedings. We stand as proud Canadians, all of us, in discharging our duties.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Yesterday, when I asked about the right of a citizen to raise a Canadian flag, Minister Bartolucci said the question was inciting inappropriate

behaviour. Only in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario is asking a question inciting and the right to fly Canada's flag inappropriate behaviour. The man was in his own yard, flying a Canadian flag.

Liberals used to believe that this was an act of expression protected by section 2(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We know from the citizenship minister's answer that the McGuinty Liberals' new policy against flying the Canadian flag isn't being applied in Toronto St. Paul's yet. But who else in Ontario should be on notice that flying the flag makes them a provocateur?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Again, we all stand for the principles which our flag represents, and those who represent the laws on which the flag stands stand for those principles as well. Whether they're the police, whether they're the crowns, whether they're the judicial officials, whether they're the lawyers, they all stand to discharge those duties, sometimes in very challenging and difficult circumstances, and sometimes their role is to make sure that they try to keep matters as calm as possible so that we can, as a society, get to a more peaceful, prosperous and fruitful resolution of very difficult and challenging issues.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the transportation minister. There seems to be some confusion over on the government side when it comes to declaring public transit an essential service. Monday morning, the transportation minister said the McGuinty government was opposed, but Monday afternoon, 29 McGuinty government MPPs, including a half dozen cabinet ministers, voted unanimously in favour. Yesterday, the Premier dodged the issue, saying it was up to municipal politicians to decide. My question is, what is the McGuinty government's position on declaring public transit an essential service?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite knows perfectly well that in private member's business it is the custom of this House to vote in favour as part of the democratic process to get a bill into play.

The Premier and I and our caucus are on exactly the same page. It really is up to the people of Toronto to decide whether they want to request that the provincial government look at the issue of the TTC being declared an essential service. There has been no departure from that position. That is the position that both I and the Premier have expressed.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I thought George Smitherman had left the McGuinty cabinet but it looks as if he's still informing polity.

Rather than abdicating its responsibility for public transit in Toronto and elsewhere, this government should stop playing games and actually do something constructive for public transit. It could start by making a commitment to fund half of all operating costs. Municipal polit-

icians have already called exactly for that. When will the McGuinty government finally deliver?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Since 2003, we have committed almost \$12 billion to transit projects in Toronto. I think by any standard, and particularly the standard set by the member opposite's party, that is a huge commitment to public transit in Toronto. That includes more than \$3.5 billion to the city of Toronto for a number of transit initiatives, including the Spadina subway extension, revitalization of Union Station and money for the replacement of 204 streetcars; in addition, almost \$8 billion committed to Metrolinx for rapid transit projects.

Our commitment to transit across the province, but transit in the city of Toronto, is absolutely unquestionable. Twelve billion dollars is the physical manifestation of that, but I think the other reality is that we have worked in partnership, Metrolinx is working in partnership with the city of Toronto because we understand how important transit is to this city.

TOURISM

Mr. Rick Johnson: My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Culture. Tourism generates employment, supports small businesses and stimulates the economy. That's why investing in marketing Ontario and, more specifically, our regions needs more efficiency and coordination. However, there is a concern in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. The implementation of the 13 new tourism regions will have Haliburton county divided into two different tourism regions.

The Haliburton County Echo quotes Sally Moore, who owns Sunny Rock Bed and Breakfast in Minden, as saying, "There is concern for the county being split up after so many years of work to create an identity for the Haliburton Highlands."

What assurances can you make to the tourism operators in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock with regard to their concerns over the implementation of the new tourism regions?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for the question. The tourism industry has become more and more competitive. There is a need to act. This is why my government commissioned the competitiveness study. As a result, we are implementing 13 new tourism regions that will help us better market Ontario.

I would like to assure the honourable member and tourism operators across Ontario that these steps are being taken to better showcase Ontario, to strengthen the industry and stay competitive. We are building on past successes and encouraging further co-operation between regions and tourism organizations. We are confident that these regions will work together to grow tourism in Ontario and take it to the next level.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Johnson: Tourism is an economic driver for Ontario. The benefits are far-reaching. Tourism strengthens our province and provides the 13 million people who

reside here with a better quality of life. From one end of the province to the other, there really is so much to discover.

We all have a vested interest in attracting more visitors. Increased visitors are a must for Ontario and for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. At the heart of the matter is the future of tourism across the province and in Haliburton. We need to ensure that the implementation of these regions will ensure greater efficiency in marketing and managing tourism while giving Ontario a competitive edge.

Will the implementation of these new regions support the long-term viability of tourism in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member again for the question.

As a result of our government's consultation, as a result of the study, as a result of our investments, there will be long-term viability in our tourism industry.

The study engaged 500 tourism partners. It consisted of 13 public consultations and 200 written submissions. While developing regional boundaries, we had 17 planning sessions and yet another 40 written submissions. We are also investing a total of \$65 million a year for two years in support of the tourism industry.

The honourable member is correct: Tourism is an economic driver for Ontario, and we are going to keep it that way.

RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

Mr. Frank Klees: With us today at Queen's Park are members of the Ontario Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association and Camping Ontario—and I'm pleased to hear the minister's support for tourism. My question is to the Minister of Transportation, because they're here with a very specific and very practical request, and that is a request that has now been ongoing for some five years to the Ministry of Transportation. It simply takes a small regulatory change.

In the province of Ontario, unlike other provinces throughout this country, someone wanting to drive a recreational vehicle is required to have a class A licence. That is essentially a commercial truck driver's licence. In other provinces, it's simply the equivalent of a class G licence.

My question is this: Will the minister agree to meet with representatives today for but a few minutes to hear their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to welcome, wherever they are, their representatives to the House—thank you very much for being here—and I want to thank the member for the question.

I did have the opportunity, at the Ontario Good Roads Association conference yesterday, to meet with some folks who had some concerns about snowmobiles and the operation of snowmobiles. I think you're talking about a different issue, but I just want you to know that I am

interested in these issues. I don't have the answer for you in terms of the logistics or the actual regulation that you're speaking of.

I'd be happy to talk to the folks. Whether I can do it today or not—I'll certainly touch base with them. I'd certainly be happy to hear the details of the issue and to explore it with you.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: It is a very straightforward issue. The ministry, for the last number of years, has had representation—and I appreciate the fact that the minister is agreeing to meet with these people. They are here today. The minister surely can find 10 minutes in her schedule today, even if it's immediately following question period. I would just ask her to take the opportunity to hear from them on this straightforward issue. Will she agree to meet with these people immediately following question period?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd be happy—and the member will introduce me—to have a conversation with them. I do have to ask—because this member was the Minister of Transportation—if this was such a simple issue, why it didn't get changed when he was the Minister of Transportation. Methinks there might be a layer of complexity that I haven't heard about. But I would be happy to hear from the members who are here.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. On Monday, I met with a group of mayors from the Northern Ontario Municipal Association, and they expressed real concern about Queen's Park ignoring northerners. High unemployment is wreaking havoc on their families and communities. In Thunder Bay, for example, food bank use has soared by 40%. People are leaving the north in droves to find jobs. Why is northern Ontario being abandoned by their government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago to travel through northeastern and northwestern Ontario and to meet with a variety of mayors, and there is no doubt that the north is experiencing challenges, particularly unemployment, and a range of very difficult issues. We have taken some steps up until now in terms of \$1 billion for the forestry industry; the northern Ontario heritage fund, \$1.3 billion to create 12,000 jobs; a new mining act; the northern highway strategy; infrastructure, \$470 million.

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There are far too many people not working in the north, there are far too many challenges of international commodity markets, but there are also some bright spots. The Ring of Fire has such enormous potential. We look forward to working with our northern mayors, our northern colleagues, and the members of this caucus whom the people of northern Ontario return to the Legislature. We have more to do. We will take steps to assist—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I've got to say, I don't think northern mayors are going to be very happy with that non-answer.

The Premier himself said recently that Ontario is not going to grow "by pulling stuff out of the ground." But northern resources generate billions of dollars for Ontario's economy and for this provincial government's coffers. More and more of the resources that are being extracted by Ontario workers are being sent somewhere else for processing. Why, then, does this government seem so content to sit idly by as northern Ontario loses good-paying, value-added jobs?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: When we proceeded on building the subway and extending it and wanting to buy cars from Bombardier in Thunder Bay, what did that member and her party do? They said, "Don't do it. We don't agree with that."

I had a very good meeting with the mayor of Sudbury, a former federal New Democrat, and he thanked this government for its efforts on behalf of his community. I have had countless meetings with the mayors of Thunder Bay and Kenora and a variety of other communities. While they acknowledge and we acknowledge that there are enormous challenges, they also acknowledge and thank this government for responding in a variety of files.

What I'll say to the northern mayors but more importantly to those northerners who pay taxes, those northerners who are worried about their jobs or have lost their jobs, is that this government will continue to stand with them and make the kinds of investments that will help get northern Ontario through this enormously challenging time.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, yesterday the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth released his annual report. The independent advocate's office serves children and youth by highlighting their concerns related to child welfare, youth justice, mental health, provincial demonstration schools, First Nations and special needs.

The advocate's report raises many concerns related to access to supports for children with special needs, children facing mental health challenges, and youth living in care and those leaving care.

Minister, what has your ministry done in these service areas to enhance services for our vulnerable young people, and what are you doing to act on the concerns raised by the advocate in yesterday's report?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member for Ottawa Centre for his question but more particularly for his advocacy on behalf of youth and children in his community and beyond.

I'm very pleased to have a chance today to talk about the advocate's report. I want to thank the child advocate for the work that he does and the voice that he provides children and youth across the province. I want to thank him for working with us on these important issues. I'm so

very pleased to be part of a government that allowed and enabled the independence of the child advocate so that we can continue to work in partnership.

The issues that the advocate raises are the very ones that are active files within my ministry. I had the opportunity to work with him very closely just this week. He and I worked closely together on an issue of great importance to both of us.

Let me tell you some of the steps that our government is taking. We've increased base funding to children's mental health. We've invested more in the support for mental health services. We're transforming child welfare—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I've been proud to work closely in my riding of Ottawa Centre with great organizations like the Youth Services Bureau and Roberts/Smart Centre that offer a wide variety of important services to vulnerable young people.

However, Minister, the advocate's report specifically highlights some troubling conditions for Ontario's young aboriginal population. He cites high rates of attempted and completed suicide, and reports that these children, living on and off reserve, are often without adequate mental health services and that they live in unacceptable poverty.

How is your ministry looking to support and provide opportunities to Ontario's First Nations children and youth as we look forward to a better situation for these vulnerable communities?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I agree with the advocate that we have much more to do to support better outcomes for Ontario's aboriginal young people, and I am absolutely committed to doing that work.

At the end of last year we were able to provide an additional \$4.1 million to two aboriginal CASs, Tikingagan and Payukotayno, to ensure that they could continue to serve the children and families in their communities. We have now provided an additional \$2.5 million in funding to the six aboriginal CASs in recognition of the very issues that the advocate is raising.

I've recently returned from a trip to the far north, where I heard from chiefs, councils, teachers, foster parents, front-line workers and public health nurses, and it's clear to me that the issues these communities face are unique and require an all-hands-on-deck approach.

I work closely with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. We continue to tackle these critically important issues. There is a great deal more work to do, but we are 100% committed to doing that important work.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Minister, last week I met with six representatives from York region's children's mental health agencies, and

their financial situation is nothing short of desperate. Their current funding only allows them to accommodate 16%—I said 16%—of the identified need, and that means that 84 out of every 100 children in York region needing mental health services are going without—84 out of 100 families being torn apart with no help in sight.

Minister, when will this government give children's mental health in York region the support that you have the responsibility to deliver?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have an opportunity because I, too, was in York region last week and visited the York Centre for Children, Youth and Families, which is doing incredible work on the ground in communities, serving children who need that help and attention.

I am so proud to be part of a government that provided the first base funding increase in over a decade, in 2004-05, and another \$24.5 million in 2007-08. We've invested an additional \$64 million in support to expand mental health services for children and youth—an increase of 20%.

Is there more to do? Of course there is. But good work is being done in communities across the province. I've been talking to those groups about how we can better improve the services that they're providing in communities. It is something that we have very much focused our attention on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: The minister is certainly right: They are doing good work, and in spite of you.

In York region, Children's Mental Health Ontario has taken on the arduous task of child mental health support, yet York region only receives—here are the numbers—\$127 per child while the rest of the GTA gets \$221 per child. The people of York region are tired of being treated like poor cousins of the GTA by this Liberal government on this file and many other files.

Minister, will you commit today to fully funding the mandate of Children's Mental Health Ontario? Yes or no?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I heard some echoes in the House about where these questions are coming from, and I agree very much that this is quite rich coming from the other side.

I point to the Auditor General's report in 2002: "Since 1992, there have been no increases in base funding provided to community mental health agencies for programs that were operating at that time. One district health council noted that this has forced community mental health agencies 'to reduce services'...."

The good work that's being done in communities across the province is in partnership with our ministry. We continue to work on these critically important issues and expand services for communities. I've met on many occasions with Children's Mental Health Ontario. I'm learning about the innovative solutions that are being developed across the province. Yes, there's more work to do, but for the first time in many years, they have a government that is committed to doing this work in partnership with them.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Perhaps not surprisingly, my question is also for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

A government study concludes that Hamilton and Niagara families face the highest wait times in Ontario for children's mental health services. They face delays in obtaining early intervention programs for children, waiting 68 days on average compared to 17 days in the rest of the province.

When will the government do the right thing and address this glaring disparity?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have a chance to talk about this important issue that exists in the community of Hamilton and beyond.

The reason that we know what is happening in Hamilton is because for the very first time our government has released a policy framework for child and youth mental health, and we are measuring and undertaking the most comprehensive data collection effort ever.

We're not scared of these issues. We understand the importance of the work being done in communities across the province. It is only by measuring your baseline and understanding the support that exists in communities that you can know where to focus your efforts to do more for the families, to respond to the families whose children need these services.

As I said to the Hamilton Spectator, it's incumbent upon all of us now to work together to improve the services for children in Hamilton and beyond.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The children of Hamilton and Niagara need action, not a bunch of talk. The minister's vague response isn't helping agencies like Lynwood Hall Child and Family Centre in Hamilton to deal with the severe and immediate growing need that's happening in our community. Children are in crisis, and this government is turning its back on them.

Will the minister agree right now to steady, dedicated funding that will rebuild the system and bring the wait times down to the provincial average?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I work closely with my colleague from Hamilton on this important issue, and we've made big investments, significant investments, in Hamilton's kids. We've invested \$15.6 million to support the establishment of 1,256 new licensed child care spaces; we've invested nearly \$3 million this year in five Hamilton OEYC's; we've provided 19 Hamilton agencies \$14.6 million in annualized children's mental health funding, and since 2003 these agencies have received a total of \$95.7 million in funding.

Is there more to do? Of course there is. Mapping out has allowed us to take a good, hard look at the services that do and, in some cases, do not exist. With that information, we will be able to continue to bring partners to the table, work with the parents, work with the commun-

ity providers to find innovative models and solutions to meet the needs of these kids, and that is exactly what we will do.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Many of my constituents have been worried about the access to family physicians and patient care in Ontario. They want good quality for their loved ones close to where they live and where they need it.

It's of the utmost importance that each Ontarian has access to a family doctor within their neighbourhood. It is crucial that we continue to achieve this goal so that Ontarians can get the care they need as fast as possible. With increases in chronic diseases over the years, it's also important that dietitians, nurses and other health care professionals are available to meet the various needs of all Ontarians.

Could the minister please update this House on the progress made to provide Ontarians with access to family doctors and other health care professionals?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I couldn't agree more with the member from Peterborough. When it comes to access to family health care, we've made real progress and we're committed to making even more progress.

I'm very pleased to report that we have now created 170 family health teams across the province. These teams consist of doctors and nurses and other allied health care professionals, and I want you to know that we are planning even more.

The success of these teams has been nothing short of overwhelming. So far, these 170 teams are providing care to more than two million Ontarians; 334,000 of those had no access to primary care before the family health teams were created. So not only do Ontarians have better access to health care, but we've hired approximately 1,300 new allied health professionals, and these numbers will continue to grow as more become operational. In time—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Another area of importance for my constituents is the current supply of family doctors. Many people are worried that the effectiveness of family health teams is not yet proven. When people have serious health problems to discuss with their family doctor, they want to know that there is a constant supply of new physicians looking to set up practice in Ontario. I know that a lot of work has been done to increase the number of family health teams, but it's also important to attract doctors to the province and ensure job opportunities for Ontario medical students.

Can the minister please explain what the government is doing to increase the number of family doctors throughout the province of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The family health teams have proven to be so successful that they have actually captured the attention of the New England Journal of

Medicine, which has praised them, praised the collaborative approach and the patient-centred care.

Peterborough is an excellent example of success when it comes to family health teams. They have five family health teams, 81 doctors, 16 nurse practitioners, 24 registered nurses, six dietitians, eight mental health workers and five social workers all working in a collaborative family health team model. They're providing care to over 100,000 patients, including 17,000 who did not previously have access to a family doctor. But we've got to continue to increase the number of doctors in the province. There are more than 2,300 more practising today than in 2003, providing care to 900,000 more Ontarians. By 2013, we will have doubled the number of new doctors graduating every year.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is to the Deputy Premier or Acting Premier. We all know that the Xstrata smelter in Timmins is closing down, and the question has been brought forward on a number of occasions. However, the question hasn't been asked regarding the ONTC rail line. The number one customer for the ONTC rail line is the Xstrata smelter. What's going to happen to all the employees and to the ONTC rail line in northern Ontario should that smelter close?

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: My colleague points out the support that this government has provided to the ONTC after repeated cuts to that service under his government. It's passing strange that this party would now wake up to the challenges in northern Ontario. Year after year, they ignored the needs of the north and year after year, they did not respond to the legitimate aspirations of the people of the north.

There's no doubt that what's happening in Timmins is a very difficult circumstance. I know the Premier and my colleagues have spoken with the mayor of Timmins. I've been involved in some discussions. It's a difficult situation but the people in the north know they've got a government that understands their needs, understands their challenges and will continue to work with the north.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SMART METERS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I find it very concerning that this government has not taken into consideration how smart meters will ultimately penalize those that are home during the day in peak hours, such as seniors and stay-at-home parents with young children.

Ontarians will have to pay 9.3 cents per kilowatt hour for their electricity from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. and then again from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. From 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. it will be reduced to 8.0 cents per kilowatt hour, but when Ontarians sleep the cost is only 4.4 cents per kilowatt hour, from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.

The McGuinty Liberals say that they are “encouraging us all to think about how and when we use electricity,” and “how working together to reduce our use at peak times makes good sense.” What doesn’t make good sense is to expect working parents to pay 9.3 cents per kilowatt hour to bathe their children, to cook dinner for their children and to do their laundry unless they wait until after 9 p.m.

The McGuinty Liberals are not working together with our seniors when they are encouraging them to keep the heat and the air conditioning low and off until after 9 p.m. The biggest burden is placed on Ontarians who are unable to change their lifestyle to accommodate the system.

ENERGY CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Energy marketers have been going through my riding selling electricity contracts and gas contracts to the public. This weekend, I went into the Bain Apartments Co-op in my riding and talked to people who had been subject to the sales pitch. My constituents told me that a number of times, when they asked whether the salespeople were from Toronto Hydro, they were told no, they were the people that supplied Toronto Hydro. I don’t know what the energy marketing bosses say, but I can tell you what’s being said at the door, that people are being given the impression that these marketing companies are providing Toronto Hydro with a supply of power.

I advised my constituents that the marketers weren’t companies that had their own electricity supply but made money selling the kinds of contracts they were flogging at the door. I advised them that my office deals with a lot of people who sign these contracts and find themselves paying much more than their neighbours and in a legal maze when they try to get out of the contracts—a maze of penalty payments and automatic renewals.

I say to anyone who has a salesperson who comes to their door trying to sell them a big money-saving electricity or gas contract that they should very politely say no and close the door. Do yourself a favour, don’t waste your time and don’t get your family or budget tied up in knots.

JOHN BABCOCK

Mr. David Zimmer: A few days ago, Canada’s last known First World War veteran passed away. John Babcock died at the age of 109 years.

He grew up on a farm in the Kingston area, in a family of 13 children. When he was only 16 years old, he joined the Canadian efforts in the First World War. He initially

hid his young age, but when the truth became known he was not permitted to fight on the front lines. He was sent instead to the Boys Battalion, where he eagerly trained to help his countrymen. Thankfully the war ended just before his 18th birthday, allowing him to return home.

The bravery and courage shown by John Babcock and his fellow soldiers make me feel proud and grateful for all that they did for this country. I am deeply saddened by the loss of this Canadian, our last living connection to the efforts of our country in the First World War.

I know you will all join me in honouring John Babcock by remembering his sacrifice and the sacrifice of all First World War veterans, just as we mourn his passing and offer our sincere condolences to his family and to his friends.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just would ask all members and guests to join me in a moment of silence. This is truly a historic passing and very much an end of an era. I would ask that we join in remembrance of John Babcock, the last surviving veteran from Canada in the First World War.

The House observed a moment’s silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Brant on a point of order.

Mr. Dave Levac: Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence. I know it’s unusual, but—we normally do this, but to confirm with you that if we could, with unanimous consent, seek to take that statement and your wish to have us stand in honour of John Babcock and send it to the family.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): If the honourable member from Willowdale can be of any assistance in passing those comments on to the family, I think it would be very appropriate to have the Hansard sent to them.

Mr. David Zimmer: I will do that, Speaker. Thank you.

MUNICIPAL CONFERENCES

Mr. Ted Arnott: Today the annual conference of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and the Ontario Good Roads Association comes to an end. I want to recognize these two organizations and thank them for the outstanding public service that they perform, and thank all who participated in the conference.

In addition, I want to congratulate Mr. Paul Johnson of the county of Wellington, who becomes the president of Good Roads; and Mayor Chris White of the township of Guelph-Eramosa, who is the incoming president of ROMA. Through the leadership of these two gentlemen, Wellington county demonstrates its professionalism and its pride.

I was glad to take part in this year’s conference, as I have for the last 19 years. It’s not easy when the House is concurrently sitting with the conference. However, I found the subway is still the best and fastest way to go back and forth to the Royal York Hotel.

This year I was invited to meetings with the town of Erin, where we discussed the substandard ambulance service in eastern Wellington county with Ministry of

Health officials; and with the township of Puslinch, where we discussed the long-delayed improvements to Highway 6 south of Guelph, including the Morriston bypass, with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation.

I was also glad that our party's leader, Tim Hudak, made time to meet with the boards of ROMA and Good Roads and host a reception for delegates that was a good time for all.

Most of all, I enjoyed the opportunity to dialogue with our municipal partners and colleagues, who represent the first order of government, the one that's closest to the people we are privileged to serve.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm happy to report that the \$22 million our government has recently promised Ontario's children's aid societies will ensure that my city of London's CAS remains open.

The CAS of London and Middlesex was facing a financial crisis, but due to our government's actions, it will now receive a \$1.1-million lifeline. This money will oversee the daily operations of London's CAS, and the meaningful work that this agency does will continue.

To help these funds go further, a provincial commission is working on restructuring the current system to be more efficient and effective. This will ensure that our agencies will be able to have more resources at their disposal.

1510

The importance of our CAS is immeasurable. CAS employees and volunteers work tirelessly to serve and protect Ontario's most vulnerable population, our children. Of the numerous children's service agencies in Ontario, CAS is among the longest-running, with nearly 2,500 cases addressed in 2009.

I'm proud to say that our government's efforts have helped the CAS of London-Middlesex to keep its doors open. Also, when Minister Bentley, Minister Matthews and I met with them last week, we promised to continue to work with our agency in London to help them go through their difficult financial time, because they do an excellent job on behalf of all of us in the city of London and in Middlesex county.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to rise and comment on Local Democracy Week, a program that was held here at Queen's Park on Friday, November 27. I thank the Speaker for being an active participant in organizing it.

It was my privilege to invite the students from Holy Trinity Catholic Secondary School in Courtice who attended. Principal Rosemary Livesey and teacher Bridget Girard are to be commended for their leadership in providing a suitable learning opportunity to the students.

Like all the approximately 200 youth who attended, the students from my riding were keenly interested and

impressed to find out all they could learn about politics and the political process by meeting the people who do it: the MPPs; city councillors, including David Miller; of course, our Speaker; and special guests.

The day was an outstanding program and included remarks by Craig Kielburger of Free the Children. Those students are the future of our Ontario. Indeed, judging from their interest, enthusiasm and advocacy, I'm confident that this will be a suitable future event for students to participate in, and I would encourage any student to participate in programs like it.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: As we all know, a series of earthquakes devastated the country of Haiti on January 12, 2010. About three million people have been affected by this disaster. Approximately 200,000 people lost their lives, not to mention the damage to their infrastructure.

It is heartwarming to see the outpouring of help and support from around the world. Today, I want to draw attention to one organization that took the lead to coordinate the Haiti, You Are Not Alone earthquake relief efforts.

The Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto is a not-for-profit organization in my riding of Scarborough-Rouge River. I'm so proud to inform the Legislature that the CCC, along with 80 organizations and businesses, came together and pledged their support to help.

They raised over \$250,000 for Canadian Red Cross Haiti earthquake relief through a variety of activities, which included a fundraising dinner, donations from a concert, interested classes and children at their Saturday school, as well as donations from the public. The federal government matches this amount, making it over a quarter of a million dollars raised.

I want to congratulate the chair, Dr. Ming-Tat Cheung, and the board of directors of the CCC for their leadership in this humanitarian effort. More support is needed, and I challenge organizations and businesses to join the efforts across the province and the country in helping the people of Haiti.

FIRST AID TRAINING

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I rise in the House today to welcome the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation of Canada, better known as ACT, to Queen's Park. ACT is a multiple-award-winning national organization with a mission to promote health and empower Canadians to save lives.

Born in Ottawa in 1985, ACT began as a high school program in Ontario and has since grown to train over one million students across Canada. CPR training in high schools ensures that youth will have the skills and knowledge to save lives when an emergency strikes.

Ontario has been a leader in CPR training. We were the first province to fund CPR training in high schools and also the first province to fund the installation of defibrillators in public spaces.

At Queen's Park today, an automated external defibrillator awareness program will give all interested members and staff a demonstration in AED usage and CPR techniques. Also, ACT will be discussing the benefits of having CPR programs in our provincial high schools.

The success of ACT is based on a public-private partnership model, and ACT's core partners, Astra-Zeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Pfizer Canada and Sanofi-aventis, as well as the Ontario Trillium Foundation, should be commended on their commitment to helping to educate our young people in life-saving skills.

As members may be aware, around Queen's Park we have AED devices located on many floors and in many offices. These devices are proven technologies that save lives. In the event of the unthinkable, the device is there to assist, but only if you know how to use it.

I encourage all members to attend the ACT information session and demonstration so that if the time comes, we can all be better prepared to help save lives.

TESSA VIRTUE AND SCOTT MOIR

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I rise today to congratulate Canada's Olympic ice dance gold medallists Scott Moir of Ilderton in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and his partner, Tessa Virtue, of London.

On Monday night, hundreds of people gathered at the Ilderton Community Centre for the second time in a week to watch this pair skate. Tessa and Scott finished with a score that was six points ahead of the American silver medallists.

Their journey to the Olympics began at the young ages of seven and nine when they were first paired by Scott's mother and his Aunt Carol, both coaches at the Ilderton Skating Club.

For his grade 8 graduation, Scott identified as his life's goal his desire to participate in the Olympics. On Monday, he not only achieved that but, together with Tessa, became the youngest team to ever become Olympic ice dance champions and the first North American gold medallists in a sport that has historically been dominated by the Russians.

I want to commend the Virtue and Moir families and their supporting cast of coaches and choreographers. Underpinning the bright lights, the glamorous costumes and beautiful makeup is a foundation of family sacrifice, extensive financial commitment and long hours spent in attending practices, competitions and travel with Tessa and Scott.

On behalf of my constituents, I wish Tessa and Scott all the best in the upcoming world competitions. It is our hope that they will take some downtime to enjoy the Olympics.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today I've laid upon the table the 2008-09

Annual Report of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I beg leave to present a report on special education from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: In December 2008, the Auditor General presented to the Legislature his annual auditor's report. In section 3.14 he made some recommendations regarding special education in our schools. You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that the Auditor General's mandate has been expanded to include schools as well as ministries in our government.

We had three school boards appear in front of us: the Toronto District School Board, Simcoe County District School Board and Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board, in April 2009. The committee questioned these boards with regard to issues about things like the formal identification of students with special education needs and learning disabilities, wait times for psychological and other assessments, and ensuring accountability within the system to ensure that every special-needs education student was in fact being dealt with and their needs addressed.

The committee made 10 recommendations, including one recommendation that the ministry should amend regulation 181/98 to clearly state that identification, placement and review committees fully document the strength and needs of every student with special education needs, as well as the supports and services they require.

We want to thank the boards that were involved. We think the report is good and will advance the needs and the education of these very special individuals who need a little bit of extra help in our province.

With that, I would like to adjourn the debate.

Speaker of the House: Mr. Sterling has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 96, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings / Projet de loi 96, Loi visant à protéger les régimes d'épargne-retraite enregistrés.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I beg leave to present a report on the employment and training division from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Sterling presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: This report of the public accounts committee relates to the employment and training division of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The committee that was dealing with apprenticeship training issues has, I believe, expressed some frustration in the report with the ability of the public to be able to be aware of exactly what is happening with regard to apprentices and the success of the programs.

The ministry had agreed to implement outcome-based measures, criteria and information as long ago as January 2004, yet there doesn't seem to be enough progress with regard to that. So the committee wants a report from the ministry as to when we are actually going to get outcomes and how many apprentices are completing each and every program. Unfortunately, we don't seem to have that data or information.

The committee has made an unusual request in asking the ministry to come back one year from the hearings, which took place in May 2009. In May 2010 we will be asking them how they are going to accurately measure the completion rates of apprenticeships. Otherwise, the government is hampered in not knowing exactly what steps to make going forward.

As well, we are interested in the journeyman-to-apprentice ratios, which have been a matter of controversy for some time. As you know, the Ontario College of Trades review has the authority now to strike those appropriate ratios, and we are asking the ministry to report to us by the end of 2010 as to what those ratios are.

These are but a few of the recommendations that we make with regard to the apprenticeship program. I commend the report for reading to everyone who is

interested in this particular matter, and with that I'd like to adjourn the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 106, An Act to provide for safer communities and neighbourhoods / Projet de loi 106, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des collectivités et des quartiers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's plan to blend the PST with the GST into one 13% harmonized sales tax ... represents one of the largest tax hikes in Ontario history, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"This new tax, which we are calling the DST (Dalton sales tax), will raise the cost of a long list of goods and services not previously subject to provincial sales tax, including: electricity; home heating oil and gas at the pump; haircuts; magazines; Internet; home renovations; heating; air-conditioning repairs; accounting, legal and real estate fees; condo fees; new home sales; rents will also go up; minor hockey registration fees will increase; and green fees and gym fees will also be taxed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government not impose this new tax on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I agree with this petition and I will affix my name and give it to page Haleigh.

TAXATION

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Ottawa do not want the McGuinty 13% sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over \$400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals over \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name and give it to page Amy.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its 2007 report, concluded that without dramatic reductions in human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, climate change may bring 'abrupt and irreversible effects on oceans, glaciers, land, coastlines and species;' and

"Whereas no one group, country or continent is responsible for climate change, but where all human beings are collectively responsible for solving the problem; and

"Whereas the production of greenhouse gases in Canada has increased by 27% over 1990 levels; and

"Whereas our elected leaders have a responsibility to report to the public on their actions with respect to halting climate change for the sake of accountability; and

"Whereas youth in particular have a special interest in this issue, being those that will inherit this earth, our only home.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario swiftly pass Bill 208, An Act to increase awareness of climate change."

This is signed by students from St. Mark school. I put my signature to it in support of the petition and send it up with Quinton.

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I'd also like to recognize guests in the gallery from the RV industry, as well as Camping in Ontario. One of the camp operators advises me that he operates a

campground that has a dress code. I thought that was interesting information.

I have a petition, as well:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy" and use "every day. A few examples include:" camping "coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming;" physiotherapy; "home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements"—just to name a few; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election," if we recall. "However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which costs upwards of \$600 to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned"—these are constituents from the riding of Durham—"petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I'm pleased to sign and endorse this and hand it to page Brady on his last week here at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member for the petition and I trust that he's a regular visitor to that camp he spoke of.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: What goes to camp stays at camp.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Sarnia-Lambton.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm not going to touch that.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's plan to blend the PST with the GST into one 13% harmonized sales tax," otherwise know as the HST, "represents one of the largest tax hikes in Ontario history, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

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"This new tax, which we are calling the DST, or the Dalton sales tax, will raise the cost of a long list of goods and services not previously subject to provincial sales tax, including but not exclusive of: electricity; home heating oil and gas at the pump; haircuts; magazines; Internet; home renovations; heating; air-conditioning repairs; accounting, legal and real estate fees; condo fees; new home sales; rents will also go up; minor hockey registration fees will increase; and green fees and gym fees"—also camping fees, as the member from Durham referred to;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government not impose this new tax on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I sign this in agreement and send it down with Jordan.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters / Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: First of all, I would like to seek unanimous consent to stand down our lead speaker, Elizabeth Witmer.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much for that accommodation, Speaker and members.

Now, let's be clear on Bill 242. We have caucused this, and I know our critic, Elizabeth Witmer, has great respect within the education community as a former educator, as a former chair of the school board, as well as having been the educator of the year and a former Minister of Education. She's eminently qualified to comment on this and other topics, as is the member from Trinity-Spadina, who will likely be speaking right after me.

Now, I can only give a bit of context to the bill. My wife was an early childhood educator and became a qualified, regulated, licensed teacher in the elementary school setting in the primary grades. It is a special calling. I should compliment all of those working in daycare, in nurseries under the Day Nurseries Act, as well as in the educational system.

These are young children in the formative years of their lives, and I can tell you, as a parent of five children, it's the most important gift a child receives: good, supportive care in an informed environment, a stimulating learning environment—not always a school, by the way, but necessarily in a home if it's at all possible.

On bringing in a universal program that makes it accessible to everyone, I think Richard Florida and other academics who have written on this topic would condone

the idea of trying to provide this general benefit to the population. We do live and work in the economy that's often referred to as the knowledge-based economy. A couple of the books that I've read recently would be Richard Florida's work on the creative culture, as well as Friedman's book on globalization—that's *The World Is Flat*—and also *Hot, Flat and Crowded*. They all talk about the changing economy, so this is the context. Now, again, I have five grandchildren and I'm quite aware of how important it is to have a stimulating home life and full exposure to as many enrichments as possible.

When you're talking about this in the general terms of the legislative policy, we had done a fair amount of work when we were in government. In fact, if you want to look right back to the 1990s, when Mr. Marchese was in government on that side, they had the Royal Commission on Learning. I had been a school trustee for a couple of terms myself when we brought in the whole idea of daycare attached to schools; that was brought in by your government. In fact, you did more to change the Education Act than anyone. You had the Royal Commission on Learning, the report called the *For the Love of Learning* with Monique Bégin, and the other work that was done. David Cooke was the Minister of Education.

We followed up on many of those changes, I might say, as well. The college of teachers, which they have now changed; they've made it the union of teachers, not the college of teachers. The curriculum rewrite is another good example.

So we were very supportive of education. Don't ever misinterpret that for one second. We stand very proudly on addressing the inequities in education, public education specifically, that existed in this province, not through any deliberate fault but because of the way education was funded.

What happened at those times was, the royal commission's fundamental theme was that education should be funded equitably across the province. What the case was prior to that commission was that education was funded on assessment. In other words, Toronto now, even today, has expenditure problems. I'll get to that if I'm given enough time.

Here's the issue: If you were assessment-rich, you could have a great educational system. Toronto spent twice as much as any board of education on education because they had the baseball park, whatever it's called, and the hockey arenas and the Hummingbird Centre. They had lots of industrial/commercial assessment that doesn't generate students. Small towns that don't have any industrial/commercial tax base have a residential tax base that generates students.

The member from Kingston and the Islands, the Minister of the Environment, would know. He was the mayor of Kingston at one time. He would know; he's from a similar generation. He would know that if you are assessment-poor, you couldn't properly fund education.

I have to get to the very premise of what this legislation is about: It's about fairness for the children at the end of the day. In my area, when I was a school

trustee, they spent less than \$5,000 per student. At the same time, the cities of Toronto, Ottawa and London—the wealthy boards, the wealthy areas—were spending \$8,000 and \$9,000 per student. That simply wasn't fair.

What we're doing here, in this attempt to bring early child care and call it early education for children—we're almost doomed to commit another error, a series of errors, by saying that one size fits all. Indeed, it doesn't. What about rural and remote Ontario? Three- and four-year-old children on a bus for two hours? Some of these—they have no clue on how to bring in a practical, workable solution to an important issue of equity and access.

So I put those premises on the board. I support conceptually the laudable objective. What I have trouble with is how you try to get there.

They grimace at what I'm saying, but in fact you think one size fits all. Northern Ontario will not have an easy time implementing this. Parts of Ontario are suffering from declining enrolment. Young families are moving out because they have jobs in urban centres. And I can tell you now that it takes a special type of person to be an early childhood educator.

In fact, when I reviewed the legislation—and I have, in detail. Thanks to the work of our critic, Elizabeth Witmer, our caucus has been brought up to speed. We believe this legislation, although well intended, simply does not get it right. In fact, the inequity has been perpetuated.

If you look at the bill itself—one of the ministers of the cabinet is here, talking. He should be listening, not talking. Here's the deal. Mr. Speaker, you know that in the budget announcement there's a commitment of—they spend billions of dollars like millions; they do—\$1.5 billion.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Some of the people over here should be quiet because they don't know what they're speaking about. I do, in this particular case.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: He can get up, in his two minutes, and I'll listen to him. I expect he'd listen to me right now.

Here's the deal. This is being implemented over six years. This will not provide this service to the people of Ontario on an equitable basis until 2016. Now, here's the truth: There's an election in 2011. They're doing it as an appeasement, because when does it start? The year of the election. How cynical. How cynical. Thank you—

Mr. Glen R. Murray: That would be next year.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, look, Glen, it might be different in Manitoba. I don't know; I can't speak to that.

But here's the deal: If it was going to be offered to all of the children, it would be even more difficult for us to reject it. Do you understand? But it isn't. I'm going to list—again, I may have to seek a special exemption because there is a lot more to get on the record than I've been given time to.

1540

Mr. Robert Bailey: You need more time, John.

Mr. John O'Toole: I need more time. But I want to put some important comments and observations on the record.

Mr. Robert Bailey: We'll ask for unanimous consent.

Mr. John O'Toole: We'll get unanimous consent because I know they want to hear more about this.

Here's the deal: It isn't equitably introduced, that's for sure. The other part is this: If you look at it—there was a comment made today from the Auditor General's report and the esteemed member from Ottawa-Orléans, that area—Mr. Sterling. That was about the access to special education. So parts of education today aren't being properly serviced.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Your guy is Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

Mr. John O'Toole: Whatever. They're both representing a large centre.

All I'm saying is, there isn't enough money in the educational system today for children with special needs—autism and other learning disabilities. There is simply not enough money today in the system. You're adding some money but not enough money for the system. So you're making the system worse.

I would say that is one of the things I see right now. Funding for special education is insufficient. That's been noted by the Auditor General, noted in the comments in the public accounts committee and reported to this House. I'm ashamed to say that the government is not likely going to react to those children and families suffering autism and other poorly delivered services in our schools.

Not only that, in introducing this, there is no capital money, no money for these children, for smaller tables, smaller desks, special play materials and resources. There is no capital money—none. So they're going to have to take these old classrooms, cut the legs off the desks or some stupid kind of accommodation. I have no idea. That's how it's going to look, though. You're going to have a half-assed job when you're done.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I apologize if I offended anyone.

Nonetheless, here's the deal—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: You're not listening.

Not only that, they committed in the last election to have class sizes down to 20. What does this do, because of the numbers and the pupil-teacher ratio?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Capping.

Mr. John O'Toole: Capping. It's now going to be 26. Can you imagine adding two more, four more, five more children in each classroom for those teachers, who, I should say on the record, work hard. My wife just retired from teaching. It is a difficult job. It's a special calling. It's not just a job with good pay and good holidays. It's a lot of work.

Here's the deal, if you're really listening: Now they're going to have 20 of these little children—often many of

them aren't toilet-trained—on a bus, in snowsuits, getting dressed, getting undressed. Under the Day Nurseries Act, it's eight to one. You think you have it right? I can tell you now, you've designed it to fail. It's designed to fail but it will accommodate some of the union commitments you've made, the people who put up your signs and things.

I just want to get on the record here a few more things. There are a couple of things here that I think are quite suggestive. Here is one that you should pay attention to for a minute: Five years to get ready, the full-day-learning program “will require”—here's the key word. Remember, in law it's all about language. It says—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: You'll get your two minutes, if they give it to you, so just be quiet for a few seconds.

“Require collaboration”—now, look at that. It's going to require collaboration among the teachers, who will be the bosses, and the early childhood educators “to provide high quality and effective play-based education to support enhanced learning and cognitive, emotional and social development for children.”

Honest to God, it's so prescriptive that they've mandated here to collaborate.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Is that bad?

Mr. John O'Toole: Collaborate with whom? What is the parents' role in this? The parent is the primary educator. Do not dismember and disrespect the role of the family. There are different forms of families; I get that. But engage the parents and help them to be more effective in stimulating environments for their children. Don't think that the government should raise them from childhood till they're 30 years of age. That's entirely the role of the current government: They think they're going to engineer the world for everyone.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Oh, stop it.

Mr. John O'Toole: But, John, the truth will set you free. Listen up here.

Now, here's a very key part. This is under the Education Act. You see, early childhood educators who now have a college degree aren't regulated as such under the Education Act. There's an Education Act modification here. It says, “Designated early childhood educator” means an early childhood educator who is appointed by a board to a position in junior kindergarten, kindergarten or extended day programs that is designated by the board.” What that means is, these people are going to be assistant teachers, really. If they had a Ph.D. on the learning grid, the way the union thing works, they would make more than the person who's an ECE—a lot more, probably double.

I think that's ineffective. I think they should introduce it, I think it should be done in a measured way, and I think it should be done as a complement to what already exists in many communities—and they should provide resources, perhaps not as much as there would be to run a school, because today, the grants per student are about \$7,000 in an elementary setting. That's \$3.5 million per school. What is the money spent on? It's payroll, basic-

ally; it's payroll. I'm telling you. I was a school trustee for about eight years so I have some clue about it.

All I'm saying is that first principles apply here: the important objective, probably widely supported, given that both adults in a family have to work today because of the high taxes municipally, provincially and federally, as well as other payroll taxes for government services—some of which are extremely important; I will complement that.

Mr. Robert Bailey: And the HST.

Mr. John O'Toole: Now they're going to add the HST, and by the time I get out of paying my property tax, I pretty well ruin 10 grand. That's just my property tax.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, I have the privilege of having it in a nice place, but it's an indicator, a barometer. I'm an ordinary guy with five children and I'm commenting in a very practical way to the bureaucrats who write this. There's nobody in this Legislature, including the minister, who had anything to do with writing the words, just the direction. I'm saying to you that the direction is faulty. It's faulty. The implementation has failed. It's not fair. It's going to take six years—that's two elections—and I would put it on the table now that it's my wish and my hope that the current McGuinty government won't be elected in 2011, based on a lot of reasons, not the least of which is this. But I'm going to be running because I intend to win, or I'd like to win.

Applause.

Mr. John O'Toole: I hear no applause from the other side.

I think there's more to this bill, and if anybody wants, they can look my website up. I'll put some information on there for you, because it's clear.

But here's the context of the economy: Can they afford to do this at this time? Rather than do it wrong, let's wait and get it right. Why implement it over six or seven years? Why have one size fits all? My riding is a lot of rural areas. Are they going to be operated in the summer, when the real farm work is done, or are they going to mandate it for the summer, when parents used to go on holidays? These are just practical questions that I'm raising. I can't see why there's such an upset to it.

Will they tax the children with your new tax that hasn't been completely outlined? The minister is here today. You're spending \$2.8 million more every hour than you're taking in as revenue—\$2.8 million more in spending. Wait a minute. That spending is money from the people working here. Your parents and the people who still have jobs in Ontario create the wealth that we get to spend. Always keep that in mind. If you're spending someone else's money, there's never enough; if you're spending your own, there's never enough—and that's the real test.

Plus, you have an operating deficit. Here's the issue here: About 20% of your total spending is debt. When they had these stimulus programs, they injected a lot of money into the economy—\$3 trillion in the United States. That infusion of money is future taxes. That extra

money creates more demand in the economy, which affects inflation. In economics, interest must always be greater than inflation, so interest is going to be up 2%. Many, many people are going to be struggling when the implications of stimulus spending kick in, and there's going to be a serious second notch to the current recessionary stuff; mark my words.

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I'm not trying to scare, but why would you add programs that are faulty in their design and in their delivery? I humbly ask you: a great program, don't wreck it, don't mess it up. Try to work with us. Our former Minister of Education, Elizabeth Witmer, could work co-operatively with you. Our leader, Tim Hudak, is committed to working with you to manage this so it is delivered fairly and effectively across the province of Ontario. But I don't see that.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Members who have been squawking will have two minutes to respond. But they've been given notes; they're going to vote for it just like a bunch of sheep.

I ask you to think about just how important it really is to get this right for our children for their future and our future. Our future is dependent on their success. If you screw this up, we'll all pay a deeper price, not just my five grandchildren but all your children and these pages here too.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want, for the record, to say a couple of things before I begin my one hour in about 10 minutes or so.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You could have spoken on behalf of the member from Kitchener-Waterloo and taken the whole hour.

I wanted to say that the member from Durham raises a few good points by way of his concerns, but I disagree fundamentally with his overall thrust. I disagree with the member from Kitchener-Waterloo as well. In fact, I disagree with the entire Conservative caucus on this.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We just can't agree on some things. I think they have an ideological proclivity toward certain things that I fundamentally disagree with; that is, they use financial affordability as a cover for their disagreement with these types of programs.

We believe these types of programs are essential and affordable. "If not now, when?" is the question I put to Liz Witmer on the Focus Ontario program when she said we can't afford it. I argued with her on the Focus Ontario program that they had eight and a half years of a good economy, and they had no interest in doing anything of that kind. If we can't do it when we have a good economy, when can we do it? That's the question I put to him.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I appreciate the comments that have been made by the members from Durham and Trinity-Spadina. To the member from Trinity-Spadina, I think we are on the same page on this one. I would like to remind the member from Durham that this is an optional program. Kindergarten in this province is optional. Parents don't have to do that.

I'm pleased that our government is moving on this now. I remember, when I became a school trustee in 1997, that the previous year, because of budget cuts, school boards across the province were given an option: no kindergarten, no junior kindergarten or you could have larger class sizes in primary if you wanted. My school board adjusted our class sizes. We kept class sizes at 20 in primary and re-implemented junior kindergarten in spite of the efforts of his government to cancel those programs.

This is something that he says is too costly to implement at this time. I believe we have to do it at this time. I'm disappointed that he has taken such a short-sighted view of this. Children in rural Ontario—we did the reports on this when I was with the school boards—arrive in grade 1 behind where they should be. This program allows our children to receive those bump-ups, to receive the extra help that is required so they can succeed. Whether they live in Kenora, Cornwall, Timmins or Toronto, children should be on the same footing.

I'm pleased that we are finally doing this. I believe we can't afford not to do this now. We want to make sure that our children have an advantage when they enter the workforce. Getting them started on the right foot is imperative to their ongoing success.

Remember that the Rozanski report, which was commissioned by the previous government, said, when it came out, that—for everyone to hear—the previous government had taken a billion dollars out of education. We've put that money back in and then some.

This is the right program to get our young children on the best foot.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes on this. I was in the backroom, listening intently to our friend from Durham. I always enjoy his theatrics, but I'm a little less enthused by his hyperbole. I did have an opportunity to pay some attention to his speech in the backroom. I didn't miss it all. I was here for some of it; I caught some in the backroom.

As is his style, he kind of rambled around a little bit. We're speaking today here about Bill 242, full-day learning, yet our friend from Durham found an opportunity to speak about many things that had absolutely nothing to do with full-day learning.

I shouldn't just say it's the member from Durham who does that. I suppose we're all likely guilty of that offence from time to time.

I did hear him talking, back there when I was listening, about autism. He found an opportunity within this particular piece of legislation to reference autism. I have

to go on the record and say that while we, as a government, feel there is still a tremendous amount more of work to be done on that file, clearly, for the member from Durham to stand in his place and suggest that, to this point so far, we have not made significant advances and invested heavily in autism in the province of Ontario, is, I would suggest, a bit unfortunate.

It also stands in stark contradiction to what they do often when they're in the Legislature, talking about the deficit facing the province of Ontario. He spent a great deal of his two minutes talking on items that he thinks we should spend more on than we're spending now. We've got a \$25-billion deficit, but he found time today to criticize us for not spending enough, not only on this thing but on many other issues that are relevant to the people in the province of Ontario.

I have to say that it's in contradiction, especially given that it's the position of that party that they were going to get rid of the health care premium. As I understand it, the health care premium was worth about \$3 billion in revenue to the province of Ontario. He's asking us to spend more. He's going to take money out of there—\$627 million on special education since 2003. I think the member missed the point a little bit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to engage in this debate a little bit. I'm going to save some of my fire for another day.

There were some puzzled looks on some people's faces when my colleague across the way indicated that it's an optional program. As most would know, even junior and senior kindergarten is optional in the province of Ontario, but it is a practical application for our kids, and we want to continue to move the education system to create a seamless system that up until now has not actually been happening.

The seamless system that we're talking about is all of the new science and research that's making it quite clear that brain development is happening very quickly and functionally, for the rest of our lives, between zero and two years old, let alone two and five. The idea here is to make sure that we create the seamless system that provides us with the opportunity to get the best opportunity for those kids at the very beginning.

If you take a look at the economics behind this, you will have found that the dollar spent in front saves us anywhere, in some research, from \$7 to \$15 of costs that are added onto us after.

Not even to mention, on the discipline side, there has been research done that indicates that kids who have had these opportunities that we're presently talking about, in organized daycare provisions and early learning—because I think we want to make sure that we distinguish between the two. Early childhood educators come with a great knowledge of how that brain development takes place through play, and we're integrating it into a seamless system.

Will there be opportunity for people to stand up and say, "What about this? What about this?" Absolutely, and

quite frankly we should be having that discussion. But to come up with a wholesale reason why we shouldn't be doing it is absolutely going back into the 18th and 19th centuries instead of the 21st century.

A seamless system is what we're looking for, for the advantage of those kids for today. That's why we want to do this program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased that I could comment to the extent that at least the other members listened for some of it, anyway. They got some of it, and some of it they just ignored.

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My riding of Durham services three major communities: Uxbridge, Scugog and Clarington. The population is in the order of about 120,000 and I have four school boards—two public and two separate—and a French language component as well. I have one school in each of the systems: Central Public School in Bowmanville and St. Elizabeth Catholic Elementary School in Bowmanville. In the north part of my riding, the Durham board has the Immaculate Conception school in Port Perry and the Durham district board has the Cartwright school in Blackstock.

My area is quite large; it goes from Northumberland all the way to York region. Some of those little children will be travelling a considerable amount of time to and from school. Hopefully, they won't be sleeping at school. Maybe they'll be sleeping in school because they're excited with their friends on the bus—I don't know.

On the surface, I agree with the thrust. The intention is laudable. The work that we did in government, some of you would recall—the member from Brant would know. We had the Honourable Margaret McCain, and Fraser Mustard did a report for us on the importance of early learning and early literacy.

Some of the programs that we set up in place were similar to this. They were optional and available, generally through learning centres within regions, and these will be closed under this legislation. Those were informal learning settings.

I think we're doing a respectable job and I commend those early childhood educators. But at the end of the time, in a more subdued note, I think that when I said not to do it, I said get it right. Implement it fairly. Take full advantage of some of Dr. Charles Pascal's report on how to provide the programming and the resources—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. John O'Toole: Could I get more time? No? Okay, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to divide my time as best as I can into three parts. The first part will speak to our support of full-time JK and full-time SK, and support the arguments that the member from Brant was

getting at in terms of what the research says. The second part is to review the bill as much as I can and make some comments with respect to that. The third is to raise a whole lot of questions as to the implementation of the bill, which the member from Durham actually spoke to as well, in part. That's why I said I agree with some of the concerns he raises, because there are many concerns that I have.

If we do not implement this well, not only will it threaten the learning that we hoped would happen in the full-time JK-SK, but it could threaten some of our child care programs, which we never anticipated might happen. But based on the way I read this, I have a very strong sense that we could get this wrong, and I'm profoundly worried.

The first part is to simply say that in 1999, in that election, the New Democrats had put out a policy announcement that said that we would, if elected, introduce full-time JK and full-time SK. It was a promise that the Liberals picked up in 2003, and that's okay. We think it's good. When parties borrow from the other parties because they like some of the ideas, we think it's a good thing.

We believe that offering JK and SK on a full-time basis provides the opportunities to students to be able to do better in their academic years. If we prevent problems in the early years, the benefits are amazing—academically, emotionally, intellectually, psychologically and economically. Some of us know this, and some possibly choose to deny it or simply, out of ignorance, not know anything about it.

But the research on this is quite powerful. The evidence documents the economic benefits from public spending on quality early childhood programs: "University of Toronto economists showed a 2:1 payback on public funding for developmentally enriched child care created from the increased taxes paid by working parents, coupled with reduced social service and compensatory education costs.

"Over 40% of the public cost of Quebec's early childhood program is covered by the tax revenues from mothers who otherwise would not be working if low-cost child care was not available.

"A Manitoba study reveals that spending on early childhood programs has an economic multiplier effect on local economies, generating up to \$1.7 dollars for every \$1 spent.

"The Ypsilanti, Michigan, study has spent 40 years tracking the cost benefits of a preschool and family intervention program on a group of inner-city minority children. It calculates \$17 in health, justice, and social welfare savings for every \$1 spent on the program.

"Heckman calculates a 7:1 return on public investment for programs for young children compared to a 1:1 payback from adult education.

"There is a growing body of evidence that some of the greatest returns on taxpayers' investments are those targeted to Canada's youngest citizens. Every dollar spent in ensuring a healthy start in the early years will

reduce the long-term social costs associated with health care, addictions, crime, unemployment and welfare. As well, it will ensure Canadian children become better educated, well adjusted and more productive adults,' says Dr. David Butler-Jones, Canada's chief public health officer.

This is the kind of evidence that has been built up over the years that we believe we can't ignore.

I know the member from Durham made reference to the member from Kitchener-Waterloo as a former educator, a former trustee, chair of the board and former Minister of Education, as if to suggest that with that authority, they could simply oppose this bill, or at least what is being tried, by virtue of experience that she brings to the portfolio. My argument is that I disagree with her, of course respectfully. The argument she put in the Focus Ontario program we did is that we simply can't afford it. She did raise some issues of concern that I will speak to, but they seemed secondary to the primary argument, and that is, we simply can't afford it. The point I put to her was that the United Nations has told the world that Canada lags behind in early childhood education programs, both as it relates to Ontario and as it relates to Canada. It's not something that I think we can be proud of. We are not spending very much on early childhood education programs, whose benefits are clearly obvious to anybody who wants to see them. The studies are there. Sometimes we use these studies to make a point, but then in reality, when it comes to what we are actually doing, we are short of all the things that governments could and should be doing, in spite of the intentions, in spite of what governments say. We're lagging behind. Much more could be done in those early years to ensure that we have a better-educated young man and young woman who will save us so much money down the line because of what that education gives to that young man and that young woman.

Ideology should not enter into the picture, but it does. As political parties, we bring different political ideas to different social issues. As a party, New Democrats support early childhood programs because we believe they are good for men and women and they are good for children.

Both men and women are required to work these days. Even when some of them would like to stay at home, women do not have the luxury to do so. Men do not have the luxury, even when they would like to stay at home to take care of the children, to stay at home and watch the children. There is no such luxury for most of the human beings I know and relate to. Even among wealthy people, who can afford to have one of the partners stay at home, many of them choose to work. That is fine by me. But in order to give the protections to men and women that they so desperately need, to give them the security they so desperately want, to give them the opportunity for affordable programs so that they could go and work, in order to be able to help them to do that, we need to provide those programs. This is the type of program that can be very beneficial to students, to parents and to society in general.

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So I'm going to go through the bill and review aspects of it that I think need a comment. Then I'm going to review, with the Liberal members who are willing to listen, the many concerns I have about the bill, which I believe, if not properly implemented, will actually hurt their intentions and not benefit them and/or the young people they're trying to serve. I'm going to be reading from Bill 242. On page 2 of the bill, subsection 2(2):

"Subsection 8(1) of the act is amended by adding the following paragraph:

"Letter of permission, early childhood educator position

"10.1 grant a letter of permission to a board authorizing the board to appoint a person who is not an early childhood educator to a position designated by the board as requiring an early childhood educator if the minister is satisfied that no early childhood educator is available...."

I state my concern immediately. We realize that the letter of permission is not a new concept. But it has been overused in the past, when we actually hired teachers who didn't have the qualification, at least not the teacher requirement that people have to go through here, and accepted many on a letter of permission. In many cases, that would have been fine; in some cases, it might not have been such a great idea. But we hired them because we needed them, and we hired them because they were cheaper than to actually send would-be teachers to the faculty of education.

This plan provided by this government, this bill, is predicated upon having qualified early childhood educators in every kindergarten classroom. It's incumbent, in my view, upon the government to make certain that we have enough qualified people now and at every point in the rollout of this initiative. We will be monitoring the number of times the boards resort to this clause, and we suspect we will not be the only ones.

But the most significant point that I wanted to make is that as we begin, in the description of what's contained in this bill on page 2, we immediately have a section that says, "Grant a letter of permission to a board authorizing the board to appoint a person who is not an early childhood educator," signifying to me, from the very start, that we're probably not going to have early childhood educators in every school and that we're likely to have in every school someone who is not an early childhood educator. That worries me. If we believe that early childhood educators are good, as I believe indeed they are, and I have to argue—not argue, but I dare say, as a former teacher, that early childhood educators are as good as teachers at doing the job that is being asked of them. But to fall back on a position that says, "If we can't find them," immediately, in the first page of the bill, suggests to me that the government is looking for a cheaper way to provide support to the teacher in those programs. I wanted to state that for the record.

Page 3 of the bill: "Planning or delivering extended day programs, allocating resources to them, evaluating or monitoring them or detecting, monitoring and preventing

fraud or any unauthorized receipt of services or benefits related to them."

Section 3.2: "Providing for financial assistance related to extended day programs, evaluating or monitoring the provision of the assistance or detecting, monitoring and preventing fraud or any unauthorized receipt of benefits related to the assistance."

Like all the programs your government comes up with, you take the credit for the announcement and then leave all the tricky parts to the boards to work out. Extended-day programs within the Education Act are a brand new concept which will require adequate funding and constant oversight. Boards will require support, not only for the implementation but the administration of this plan. They will also require a lot more specific guidance than this bill provides.

In the past, when this government has been short on specifics, it is because they have been short on support and resources. I state this at the very outset: We are worried from the very beginning about what boards will be required to do because this says to the board what it is that they will be required to do, and immediately in my mind and in the minds of many chairs of boards across Ontario—public and Catholic and French-language boards—their question will be, "How much support are we going to get?" or, "How much of our resources will we be forced to divert from the programs we are providing at the moment to be able to support this new program?" That's the question I put to you, Speaker, as a member of the government, and the question I put to the two parliamentary assistants who are here today and to whoever else in the Liberal backbench is listening.

On the same page, subsection 4(1): "Governing all aspects of the operation of junior kindergarten and kindergarten, including regulations,

"i. respecting the schools at which junior kindergarten and kindergarten are required and are not required to be operated,

"ii. respecting the hours during which and the days on which a board is required and is not required to operate junior kindergarten and kindergarten in one or more schools of the board, and

"iii. respecting curriculum and programs for junior kindergarten and kindergarten."

The concern I have: We would like to see the details of this, particularly the programs, and we hope that they will be reasonable, appropriate and available well in advance of the actual commencement of the first programs.

On page 5 of the bill:

"Provide education and accommodation

"6.1 subject to payment of fees charged under section 260.1, provide education and adequate accommodation for pupils enrolled in extended day programs operated by the board....

"6.2 subject to paragraph 3.0.0.1 of subsection 8(1) and paragraph 6.1 of subsection 11(1), operate full day junior kindergartens and kindergartens on every school day, other than professional ... days, in every elementary school of the board."

How long—is the point I make—before parents get to know what the fees will be and what criteria and conditions are attached to each extended day program? That's the question I put to the government.

Page 6: "subject to paragraph 3.0.0.1 of subsection 8(1) and paragraph 6.1 of subsection 11(1), designate at least one position in each junior kindergarten and kindergarten class in each school of the board as requiring an early childhood educator." How is this going to work? That's the question I ask. Is the one early childhood educator going to handle before and after class as well? Is the ECE, the early childhood educator, going to work from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. to cover the need? If not, who will be handling the extended day program? What if the school can't find anyone else to fill the position?

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Also, I suggest that many will not have the early childhood education qualification contained in that section, which worries me. This is the section I referred to on page 2, which talks about not having early childhood educators but rather getting people who have a letter of permission to do this work. We have a lot of questions connected to this that the government hasn't spoken to, that the parliamentary assistants have not spoken to and that the minister has not spoken to yet. We hope that at some point down the line, and hope the point will be soon, we can satisfy those who have these questions that their questions will be addressed so as to give them the comfort they're looking for. Otherwise, they will be asking these questions, educators will be asking these questions, I'm assuming the various federations will be asking, and of course I will be asking as often as I can.

On that same page of the bill, "An early childhood educator appointed to a position under paragraph 12.0.2 of subsection (1) shall be in addition to the teacher assigned or appointed to teach the junior kindergarten or kindergarten class." The question applies: Since the class sizes will be significantly increased, will there be a supply early childhood educator network set up to deal with sickness and absences to guarantee that classrooms will not have to function with their teacher alone? No one has spoken to this—not the minister, not the parliamentary assistant, not any staff of the ministry—so we really don't have a clue how they're going to handle this particular issue. If someone should fall sick, is the teacher required to do this alone? This would be absurd. I'm assuming the answer would be no. But what are the provisions that the government is making to deal with this particular problem that I have raised?

On page 7 of the bill, "appoint persons to supervise teaching staff and persons in positions designated by the board as requiring an early childhood educator and every appointee shall hold the qualifications and perform the duties required under" the act. Will the province provide support to the boards every time they make a request to the board that they are required to do something, such as appoint persons to supervise teaching staff, or will the board be left alone with another bill and many more

obligations and requirements to meet without the adequate financial support? My fear is that they will be left alone to do this with more and more obligations that they will have to address on their own and limited funding, which they've been getting for many, many years, in spite of the remarks made by my friend for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, who claims that more money has gone into the system than ever before.

On page 8, "Subject to the regulations, policies and guidelines made under this part, every board shall operate extended day programs in every elementary school of the board, on every school day, other than professional activity days, outside the time when junior kindergarten and kindergarten are operated in the school...."

My point is this: Exactly how are these limited and irregular times going to be covered, by whom and at what pay rate? If the government is going to establish a pay rate, as I believe they want to do, will the boards be stuck with the cost or will the government determine what that cost will be earlier on in the game so that boards know exactly what they're dealing with and what financial support they're going to get? Who's going to cover those programs? By whom and at what pay rate? This is the question I put to those who will be responding to what I have to say.

Page 9, section 260.1(1): "Every board shall charge the fees prescribed under clause 260.6(1)(b) to parents of pupils enrolled in extended day programs...." Are the fees going to reflect the full cost, including the cost of space, maintenance and utilities? Will the fees be charged on a usage basis or as a package for care for the year of the term? The question speaks to the point that if a parent only needs two days, are they going to be charged for the usage of those two days or will it be done differently? Are the fees going to reflect the full cost, and are parents going to have that full responsibility or will boards be subsidizing that? If the subsidies are going to be in place, who will be getting that subsidy and/or will boards be required to pick up some of that cost of the subsidies?

These are questions that I ask, and hopefully, the parliamentary assistants and others will be given notes to be able to respond to them. The ministry has many, many staff at the back there behind the Speaker taking notes as I speak. I know that and I see that. I'm hoping that whoever's taking notes there is quickly going to go to the civil servants to get some of these answers so that, as I ask them, she or he—the parliamentary assistants—can help me and make me feel better about how they're going to handle some of these questions that I've been asking.

On the same page—

Mr. John O'Toole: Are you going to use all of your time, Rosie?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: There's so much. We've got to go through the bill.

"Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the right to attend a school of a board under part II, section 167.1 or section 293 does not confer a right to be enrolled in an extended day program operated by the board." What does this mean? To the staff of the ministry

at the back, what does that mean exactly? If a child is in the full-day kindergarten program, is enrolment in the extended day program not automatic, or is it, and if it is, what does this mean?

For your benefit, I'll reread it: "Every board shall charge the fees prescribed under clause 260.6(1)(b) to parents of pupils enrolled in extended day programs operated by the board to recover the operating costs incurred by the board." Then, "Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the right to attend a school of a board under part II, section ... does not confer a right to be enrolled in an extended day program operated by the board." What does it mean? is the question I ask you.

The same page: "Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the minister may issue a policy or guideline under subsection (1),

"(a) respecting the schools at which extended day programs are required and are not required...;

"(b) respecting the hours during which and the days on which extended day programs shall or may be operated;

"(c) respecting content for extended day programs;

"(d) requiring a board to establish criteria and conditions respecting which pupils may be enrolled in extended day programs...;

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"(e) specifying criteria and conditions that a board must establish and that a board may establish under clause (d);

"(f) authorizing a board to enrol children in extended day programs...;

"(i) the children have registered to be enrolled...."

Actually, I'm skipping some stuff.

Mr. Mike Colle: Good. Skip a lot.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The point I want to make to my friend Mike Colle, from Eglinton-Lawrence, is that these are all important details, as the member from Eglinton-Lawrence knows, but until we see these details, parents have no idea what they're really getting into or not getting into.

The whole thing is sitting in limbo, is one question. But the other point I wanted to make—I was getting tired, just reading all of the new obligations the board has to shoulder—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Embrace.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —and embrace, whether they like it or not. I'm thinking to myself, "Poor boards. As if they didn't have enough. As if they didn't have any deficits to worry about; as if they haven't been slashing programs to make ends meet, to balance their budgets, as is required by law, they now have this to worry about."

My good friend from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock might be able to answer some of these questions, because he was a former big shot in the OPSBA organization. What are boards going to do? What things will they have to put aside in order to be able to do this right? Remember, I spoke in favour of this bill. I speak in favour of the intent of having full-time JK and full-time SK. But when I read the bill and I read the obligations of boards and what they're required to do—how are they

going to do it when they're constantly saying, "Don't give us any more. But if you give us more to do, give us the money so that we can do it well"?

Mr. Mike Colle: "Show us the money."

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "Show us the money," is the question. "Show us the money and the support so we could do this well."

By the way, Mike, that was a long page of "the board shall do this, the board shall do that." I'm going to go to the next page, because there's more.

"The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations,

"(a) governing all aspects of the operation of extended day programs;

"(b) governing the amount of fees that a board may charge...;

"(c) governing the time of payment of fees...;

"(d) respecting operating costs for the purposes of subsection"—this is another repeat of number 8.

Are the fees going to reflect the full cost, including the cost of the space, maintenance and utilities? Or are boards going to have to pick up the extra cost? Will the fees be charged on a usage basis or as a package for the care of the year or the term? We don't know. No answers have been given.

Further, on that page:

"(3) In making a regulation under clause (1)(b), the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall recognize that the fees to be charged by a board must bear a reasonable relationship to the operating costs incurred by the board."

The question to my buddy from Haliburton is, what does "reasonable relationship" mean? Is the government worried that the boards might charge a little more than they should? Is that what it means? Or does it mean something else? I don't know. It would be nice to define what "reasonable relationship" means, because I don't know. Will this "reasonable relationship," in terms of fees paid, vary from board to board?

By the way, who qualifies for subsidies? We don't know.

The ongoing question is, will the minister pay the full load of these programs?

Further, on that page:

"The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations respecting the provision of financial assistance to persons who are charged fees ... including regulations,

"(a) providing for such positions as the Lieutenant Governor in Council ... authorizing the minister and such other persons or entities as may be specified in the regulations to appoint persons or entities to the positions referred to in clause (a)...."

Mike, from Eglinton-Lawrence, it's another long list. You see, I'm losing my voice. I'm just getting tired of all the things the board is required to do. Another glass of water would be very helpful. Thanks so much.

"Respecting the powers, duties and functions" of this and that, "designating geographic areas for the purpose of managing the provision of the financial assistance ...

respecting agreements that may be entered into by the minister....”

Mike, do you get the point? If I were the director of education, I would simply—will I have enough hair at the end of this; will it be grey or will it disappear? Those are the questions that every director would be asking, irrespective of gender. Will the hair be grey or will it disappear?

Mr. Mike Colle: You sound like T.S. Eliot.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: He was a wonderful poet, T.S. Eliot. I wish I were as good as him.

Mr. Mike Colle: Should I eat an orange?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That was a beautiful poem, actually. But we don’t have time for that, Mike.

Here’s the question I want to ask on that. The provision of financial assistance is a very sensitive and time-consuming task that cannot be dumped on school boards.

Mr. Mike Colle: T.S. Eliot’s *Wasteland*. It’s called *The Wasteland*.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I’m not sure it was *The Wasteland*.

What will be the responsibility of schools and boards, and who will make the final call on this? Will the amount available to each school or board be capped? Will the amount available in the province be capped the same way special education funding is capped, regardless of need? These are serious questions that I put to my friend from Haliburton and others who are about to get into the debate. We’ll see. I’m not quite sure who is speaking, so I don’t know.

There is more. There is so much more. I’m trying to get through the bill, you understand.

On page 14 of the bill:

“It is the duty of the following persons to coordinate the matters listed in subsection (2) and to co-operate with each other with respect to those matters:

“1. Teachers.

“2. Temporary teachers.

“3. Designated early childhood educators.

“4. Persons who, under the authority of a letter of permission, are appointed by a board....”

“The matters referred to in subsection (1) are:

“2. Observing, monitoring and assessing the development of pupils in junior kindergarten, kindergarten and extended day programs.

“3. Maintaining a healthy physical, emotional and social learning environment.

“4. Communicating with families.

“5. Performing all duties assigned to them by the principal with respect to junior kindergarten, kindergarten and extended day programs.”

Mike Colle, my friend from Eglinton–Lawrence, do you feel the weight? David from Brant, if you were a principal, and, Mike, if you were a teacher—and you were a teacher; we have no directors in this place—think of this. If you have to do all this—I’m just reading all the extra stuff you do.

Mr. Dave Levac: I had a daycare centre in my school.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes. The Toronto board is full of child care centres, and many other boards have them too. Not as much as we did—I was there as a trustee on the Toronto board.

Just think of the additional obligations you now have. Same pay, with all the duties and responsibilities you have, and now you’re taking on something else. You, as a principal, might say, “This is good; I like it,” but are you going to get the resources to do the job well? That’s the question. Or will you have to leave something else in order to do this? That’s the other question.

Legislating a duty to co-operate hardly recognizes the complexity of the actual situation that this legislation is creating. The success of this program will require that the ministry assume more responsibility than simply legislating co-operation. Isn’t it beautiful that a minister, with the former parliamentary assistant of education, could simply legislate and then have boards, some of whom were there as chairs of OPSBA and others, deal with all of the obligations that come with yet another responsibility that you have to undertake? It’s tough.

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It’s easy to legislate. “You shall do thus,” and then you’re done; then you clean your hands. Then, in typical Liberal fashion, you say, “Oh, but we provide so much money. Oh, they’re just so loaded with money they should be able to do the job. In fact, we’ve given \$5 billion extra. With that \$5 billion, my God, you should be able to do everything.” Boards are facing deficits every year and we keep saying, “But they got \$5 billion more than ever before.” They’re barely maintaining what they’ve got and they’ve been cutting programs everywhere in Ontario to balance their budgets. The money’s simply not enough.

This is a good program, and that the money is not going to be there is my fear.

Mr. John O’Toole: That’s what I said, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That’s why I agreed with you in some parts of what you said. I did say that. I did say that the member from Durham raised some good questions and some good concerns and that I would speak to them; I did say that. I am raising many more concerns than the member from Durham raised, but they supplement what he was trying to get at: We are in disagreement with the fundamental premise of what they’re doing. But you raise some good questions.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They don’t. Ideologically, they don’t support it. I know that.

On page 16 of the bill—you see? It’s long. If you want to do a good analysis, you’ve got to go through it. Otherwise, people will simply say you’re blah, blah, blah-ing; you’re not saying anything, right?

Page 16: “Subject to the regulations, every board may establish and implement an induction program”—

Mr. Mike Colle: What’s that?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They’re professional development kinds of days. It’s training, induction

programs—"for its new designated early childhood educators."

This is what will be required of them:

"1. An orientation for new designated early childhood educators.

"2. Mentoring for new designated early childhood educators.

"3. Professional development and training appropriate for the new designated early childhood educators.

"4. Such other elements as are prescribed."

Young teachers have been telling us for years that this type of support is sadly lacking. If the government wants to provide worthwhile induction for early childhood educators, then there will have to be more of a commitment than just listing the elements. Expertise, time, coverage and resources will have to be provided. I fear, my friends from Brant and Eglinton—Lawrence—former educators—that your former educators are not going to get the support they need. That's my fear.

I know that you want to say, "I don't know. I'm not sure it's true." You'll want to say that because you want to be optimistic—and besides, you're a member of the government, so you have to be positive about this initiative. But I can tell you, based on my experience as a teacher, a school trustee and a critic for a long time, we're not giving the support to teachers and boards that is desperately required, and I really, really am worried about it.

There's more in the bill, but I'm going to leave the bill for now and get to some other points of contention.

The concern I have is that the McGuinty government continues to make highly publicized announcements that are long on media and short on substance. We totally support all-day learning, but we expressed many concerns when the government rolled out this program, and this piece of legislation does little to alleviate our concerns and the concerns of parents and care providers around the province. The announcement does commit a fixed sum of money to the creation of full-day kindergarten classes in Ontario, but the actual mechanisms to make it happen are not specified. There has been, in my view, a serious lack of attention paid to the actual implementation of this program.

We have waited for a long time for this. Many families will wait for five more years. Even though Monsieur Pascal recommended three, you obviously determined that you can't do it in three. You will do it in five, even though the minister, in her remarks, said the other day that we're going to have to act and act now. In spite of that comment, this program will be unfolded over the next five years—

Mr. Mike Colle: Naples wasn't built in a day.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But your minister said we're going to do it today. But it won't be done today, it'll be done in five years, and that will put many children behind, assuming that it would be rolled out fully in five years. And I predict, by the way, it will be rolled out in more years than five. May I dare suggest that it will be at least seven, and it will go to 10. That is what I suggest.

Now, if, God forbid, you should be re-elected, we'll wait and see what will happen. But on the other hand, I'm profoundly worried that if the Tories get elected, that will create another headache vis-à-vis this particular program. So it's hard to say—who do you do you want there, right? Who do you want there? The best option would be New Democrats. If you want this program to be implemented, you would have to count on New Democrats, and I would be happy to be that minister, to be able to do it. I would be happy to take on that job.

Mr. John O'Toole: What's Floyd Laughren doing these days?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Retired.

The question we ask: Will the funding for the initial rollout be distributed equitably across the province or will it go where there is space? Will the programs approved in the first few years be needs-based or just space-based? Sadly, I believe that this government is moving quickly to prove that it's doing the job of getting these programs under way, and it will not be needs-based; i.e., where you've got socioeconomic issues that you want to address, where you want to be able to provide the compensatory education programs that you should—and as a result you lose out on the possible equity issues as a way of making sure that you're seen to be doing well in your first year, and therefore you're going to put the programs where there is space and it's easy. That is fundamentally wrong, and I believe that's what you're about to do in your first year.

There will not be any equity, I guarantee it, in the first year because you want to get it out the door and you want to go outside the province as best and as quickly as you can without spending a dime on capital expenditures and prove to the public that you've started and you're doing it right away, but will it not be needs-based. That, I put to you, is wrong in terms of who needs the program more than others.

If we have a middle-class school with middle-class professional kids, they don't need that program as much and as fast as those kids who have economic issues to deal with, who have poverty issues to deal with, who have problems of all sorts, whether it be mental illness, substance abuse or any other kind of problem that families have to face.

We are concerned profoundly that the class size—the average class size, is what you've said—of 26 is an average, I repeat, and our concern is that class sizes may become too large, like many of our current grade 4 to grade 8 classes where there is no cap. Where you capped primary grades at 20, what happened, from our sources, i.e., teachers, is that the class sizes in grades 4 to 8 jumped through the roof. You track conveniently how many of your schools have capped the students at the primary grades, but you refuse to track what the class sizes are in grades 4 to 8, and we know they're large from parents who tell us how big some of those class sizes are. This is about to happen in this program as well.

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I put to you that an average of 26 means many classes will be higher. Even with two adults, there are practical problems caused by having 30 four-year-olds in one space.

Mr. Mike Colle: Thirty-four-year-olds?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thirty students who are four-year-olds in one space.

You have to consider snacks. As the member from Durham raised, based on the experience of his spouse, who obviously knew what she was talking about, you've got to consider snacks.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Magnare, Michael. Snacks. Nap time. Washroom accompaniment etc.

See, you haven't thought this through. You want to save some money, so you want big class sizes. That's why you want not necessarily to have early childhood educators, but people who have a letter of permission. That's why you started with that bill on page 2. I understand what you're getting at.

Large class sizes for four-year-olds is simply not going to work. If you want a learning environment, if you actually want kids to learn, and you have 30 four-year-olds in that classroom, not much learning is going to happen, and the effect of it is that it will be worse than having those children in a child care centre. It will be worse. If you have 26 or 30 or 32 kids in that classroom, no learning will take place with those four-year-olds. When you take into account the incredible pressures that the teacher will have on how you manage four-year-old kids who need to sleep, who have different sleeping patterns, who get sick and need to be taken care of, who need to go to the washroom, and you're going to have an early childhood educator accompany that one child, or maybe accompany two or three, and the teacher will be left alone with 27 students—the minister has not thought about this. The parliamentary assistants have to think about this. The government has to speak to this as a problem. And I am left with little assurance from anyone that they actually know what they're doing or that they actually have a handle on this.

Parents expect this to be all-day learning, not all-day babysitting, which might turn out to be the case if we don't deal with the concerns I'm raising. From an instructional point of view, the large numbers will limit learning. Many parents will discover that their children did more learning in the daycare they were in before this program.

Charles Pascal called for an Early Years division in the Ministry of Education to develop and implement a coordinated policy around child care. We are sure that this announcement stops well short of the completely integrated child care plan put forward. We are still awaiting the details of the actual form which the typical class will take. We want to see the actual distribution of workload between the teachers and the early childhood educators. The government is dumping all of these details on the school board and teachers' federations, and there

are few specifics in this bill to alleviate the concerns felt by many.

Many boards are already claiming that the government is not providing adequate funding to pay the going rate for early childhood educators. The government's pitiful education funding formula already places boards in a position of having to take from one program to pay for another. The question now is what programs will have to be cut to pay for an inadequately funded all-day learning program, and that's the fear that I express today, that if we do not fund this properly, in spite of your protestations to the contrary, i.e., that you're going to spend \$200 million or \$300 million, as if somehow this is going to be enough—in spite of those protestations and statements that you're making, it will put boards in a position to have to cut other programs to be able to deliver on this program.

Consideration must be given to the potential loss of revenue for daycares, which may put them at risk or drive up costs to parents whose children remain in daycares.

We are worried that when you take these children from a child care and put them in a classroom, you put that child care centre in a position of liability, in a vulnerable position of not being able to sustain itself, because if they don't get the funding they need from these extra programs and are left with very expensive programs to manage, they will not be able to stay open. That is a fear that all child care centres are speaking about, speaking to. They have legitimate concerns that this government has not dealt with it.

In addition to this worry is the worry that the \$63 million that the federal government released four years ago on the Best Start program will have dried up by the end of this year. Once those dollars have dried up, thousands of programs across Ontario will disappear. In Toronto alone, they estimate that 5,000 subsidized child care programs will disappear. That is a huge loss to this board. Windsor is closing some programs immediately—and already—as a way of dealing with these problems, because cities do not have enough money to be able to continue with these programs.

There have been some suggestions that daycares should be allowed to lower standards and increase the number of children permitted per caregiver to cope with the changes. I want to read quickly from that article written by Laurie Monsebraaten from the Toronto Star, who says, "Ontario is considering regulatory changes that would allow fewer staff to care for larger groups of young children in daycares as the province moves to all-day kindergarten."

What is that about? That is about wanting to save money, but it puts at risk the relationship that those early childhood educators have with the children they're caring for. It's a relationship that has been finely built over the years, a ratio that has been put in place to protect the educator and those children and what they're trying to do. The government is talking about increasing those numbers as a way of saving money at a time when the government wants to introduce full-time JK and SK. It's

wrong, and we're moving in a dangerous direction. That's what I put to Liberals.

This is why I support Mr. Pascal's comments when he says, "The current fragmented patchwork of early childhood services too often fails the best interests of our children, frustrates families and educators, and wastes resources." He's fundamentally correct, and that is a warning he was putting to you in the report that he submitted to the government.

That is why Pascal talked about the need to create a continuum of early learning, child care and family supports for children from the prenatal period through adolescence under the leadership of the Minister of Education: because he clearly understands that you can't take this little piece, because, as you're doing it, you're putting at risk many other programs. He understood, and he knew this is what would happen if you don't do the full continuum.

He also says, "The Ministry of Education should establish an Early Years division to develop and implement an Early Years policy framework that will create continuity of early learning experiences for children from zero to eight years of age." He also says, "The Early Years policy framework should also guide the transformation of programming for Ontario's youngest learners. Municipal authorities, with the necessary resources, should be mandated to plan, develop, support, and monitor an integrated network of Best Start child and family centres providing families with:

"—flexible part-time/full-time/full-year early learning/care options for children...;

"—prenatal and postnatal information and supports;

"—parenting and family support programming, including home visiting, family literacy, and playgroups;

"—nutrition and nutrition counselling;

"—early identification and intervention resources...."

1700

Pascal has it right. If we do what we're doing, we're entering a fragmented approach, a patchwork, a cherry-picking that may sound good from a political point of view, but if you don't have the continuum of services, if you don't provide the services that are required, as he explained, you could be putting into jeopardy some of the programs that I made mention of, and you put in jeopardy the very programs that I support. I am a strong supporter of these programs, but I worry profoundly about the potential to do this wrong. And if we do it wrong, it's not me who will lose; it's not even the Liberal government that is going to lose; it will be the children we're trying to serve and protect and help, and it will be their parents who have high expectations of you and what it is they hoped you would do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: First, I wanted to take a second or two to congratulate the minister. I haven't had the opportunity to speak to a bill she has brought forward. Minister Dombrowsky comes to this portfolio with a history on the front bench as a minister and a history here

in this place as a legislator, and I want to congratulate her on her new role.

I listened as intently as I could to the hour leadoff by the member from Trinity-Spadina. I'm almost glad he didn't have much more time, because he would have had to present his criticism, as a critic, in volumes of questions for the ministry staff and the parliamentary assistant at that point. He certainly spent his time wisely and well as a critic, putting forward the issues as he sees them and the concerns that he has.

I want to return briefly, though, to the legislation. He said clearly that he's a supporter of investing in early learning for children, as being important to their future. To come back to the bill, that's what the bill is about; that's what the program is about. It's about investing in children and giving them the best opportunity at the earliest possible stages to prepare them for a future that will be different than the future they might otherwise have had. The phasing in of a program of this nature is a prudent approach to take. It's both fiscally prudent, given the economic climate, and prudent from the standpoint of, as he said, getting it right, because clearly over time there will be a need to modify and tweak as one goes to make sure it's right. By phasing, that gives us that opportunity.

Two minutes goes very, very quickly.

I appreciated the member from Trinity-Spadina as the critic and listened carefully, and I'm sure we are anxious to respond—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened intently to the member from Trinity-Spadina, and he's right. I'm quite complimentary. He has followed education for most of the time I've been here, 15 years, in a very constructive way. He always has the right intentions and the right objectives, a laudable goal. I agree with what he was trying to conclude in his one-hour presentation, that it's a good program. It's the implementation that he has concerns with, and the consistency of programming. I concur with him in that respect. It's not to justify my position on the economic arguments—we differ on that. But on the fundamentals of the purpose of the policy, I think we're completely in line. We think it's the right thing at the right time, but how you pay for it is where we diverge.

When you look at the situation in Ontario today, an article in the paper yesterday made it very clear that the Toronto board has a deficit. I'm going to quote it here. Trustee Josh Matlow says—we have a \$25-million deficit, and he's saying that the school board has a financing problem. We also know from the Auditor General that special education is in peril. So slow down. You're drinking from a fire hose here. You're spending more money than you've got, and you may yourself have to cut back on some of the program spending. One of the members suggested that I was arguing they should spend more money. I'm arguing you should be careful of the money you're spending because you are going to set up programs that you might have to dismantle.

So I find that his comments were very direct and quite helpful. I hope that those listening will address those amendments when it comes to public hearings on this.

I'm looking forward to our critic as well, or our former critic of education, Ms. Savoline, who will bring another point of view to the discussion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to chime in on one of the points that my colleague made, and that is the issue having to do with how French Catholic school boards who have been—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're all agitated here. I can't believe it. Terrible.

I just want to chime in and say that there is an issue in regards to a lot of French boards, French Catholic boards specifically in my region, who have been offering junior kindergarten to their students for some time. There is a sense out there on the part of some of the trustees and certainly the director of education that in the end they may end up getting penalized as a result of having already budgeted for that some time ago and having offered full-time kindergarten to kids in JK—or full-time JK, I should say, to the kids in those areas. So I think that's a real concern and something that we need to turn our attention to, because certainly I think we want to reward those who have been doing this because they thought it was important. There are a number of school boards across Ontario, and particularly in our area the French Catholic board, le conseil des Grandes Rivières, who have actually been providing this to families and to children for some time. We need to ensure that they're not sort of lost in the wash when it comes to how the funding is going to flow forward. The government has announced there are a number of school boards that will be funded for full-time JK, and those have been announced, but how do you deal with those that have already been doing it?

So I just urge the government to take that into consideration and that we need to find some way of making sure those who have been on the vanguard are not punished for being ahead of the pack.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: The member from Trinity–Spadina said in there—I was listening carefully, and he basically said he was going to accuse me of being optimistic. Guilty. I'm optimistic. In my 25 years in education, both at all levels plus being a principal, when we were given challenges, of which there were many during my tenure as an educator, we rose to the occasion. We made it work. There were some difficult waters at times, and I would say respectfully, and I think he does agree with me on this, that the teachers, the principal, the support staff, the caretakers, the secretaries were marvellous people who always focused on getting the job done for those kids. I don't think you have any qualm with that.

I also want to make this other point that I hope he can pick up on, and that is that I'm in the crow's nest; I'm looking out to the future and I'm working forward. If I'm doing that, there are going to be some details that we've got to pick up on, and I thank the member for bringing up some of the concerns, along with the member from Timmins–James Bay, making sure that we get the details right. But for now I'm talking about this legislation being one of the most progressive pieces and changes to our educational system to make it seamless that we have seen in decades, maybe of all time, in terms of connecting our young learners to the system quicker and doing it in a way that all our experts are telling us it should be done.

So I'm glad he does acknowledge that. I know he's going to be presenting us with some options that need to be digested to ensure that some of the details are done, the minutiae part. I don't have any qualms with his concerns. I don't think they're as bad as what he's portraying them as. I think he is predicting hell and high water and the demise of kids as we know it, but I don't agree with him.

I want to listen carefully to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, who is going to be presenting us with an optimistic view of what our system is going to look like, and I know that she's going to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Trinity–Spadina, you have up to two minutes to respond.

1710

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I really want to be optimistic, member from Brant; I just don't see it, though. But it's important to be proven wrong; it's so good to be proven wrong. And if you address some of the concerns I've raised, I will admit it, no doubt. I will admit it, because clearly, if I give you these questions and you address them and you do so in a way that deals with them, what else would I say except, "At least you did it"?

But I'm worried that I'm not hearing any positive remarks about how this will unfold. I know that it's an easy answer to say, "We have to take our time; we will be dealing with it; blah, blah," but I worry that it's mostly blah, blah rather than putting substance to it.

I know the minister says that people have been talking for over a generation about the importance of a systematic approach to early learning. I'm not sure we're taking a systematic approach. That's why I quoted Pascal as a way of saying that we've got to worry about all of the potential impacts, from the early years through the later years. Otherwise, you're going to fragment the delivery of this program.

He was worried; I am profoundly worried. I know your minister said that we went about this in a methodical way. I'm concerned that we're not doing that. You say that your minister says that, but I just don't see it in practice.

We'll have to wait and see. I know you have faith, as indeed the member from Kitchener–Conestoga has faith in your minister and your government. I hope that we will see, through the hearings and the deputations, what

remarks your parliamentary assistant is going to say that will alleviate my concerns and the concerns of deputants.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I'm pleased to join the debate today, and I thank my colleague the member from Brant for his comments about optimism. As a former educator and as a colleague, a principal, he understands that this really is good news, and I thank him for that.

I do have a lot to say and I only have 20 minutes, so as the teacher I am, I'll try to make it succinct. I'd like to stick to the facts because I think it's important that we cover the facts here today and dispel any myths that may be out there.

I did want to say hello to my 96-year-old uncle who's watching today, Uncle Solomon. He's watching with my husband, Richard, so that's pretty exciting.

As a debating coach, the one thing we would always teach our students who were learning on the debate team—that's action for you—was to clearly state your point before you began the debate. It's pretty simple here today to clearly state the point that Bill 242, full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds in the province of Ontario, is the single most important thing we can do for our children, for our families, for our communities and for the future of this province. There we have the point. I think it's pretty clear.

If we take a look at how this has come together, I wanted to also start with a quote, as I'm prone to do once in a while as an English teacher. I wanted to refer to Denis Waitley. Denis is an author and a global leader in education and business. He says:

"All of the top achievers I know are lifelong learners ... looking for new skills, insights and ideas. If they're not learning at a very early age, they're not growing and they're not moving towards excellence."

That's what we're talking about here in the House today. Bill 242 does exactly that: It moves the students of Ontario towards excellence, towards being competitive in a global economy in a time when education is the absolute key to the success of our future as individuals, as communities and as a province.

In November 2007, the Premier asked Dr. Pascal to recommend the best way to implement full-day learning. Dr. Pascal's report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, came up with some all-encompassing comments, thoughts and ideas. Dr. Pascal points out that more than one in four children who enter grade 1 are significantly behind their peers.

I say, sitting in the House all afternoon, I heard the opposition say, "Let's wait. Now is not the time." If we have one in four children in the province who are behind their peers and the time is not now, I stand baffled. The time is absolutely now that we implement Bill 242 and look at full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds in the province of Ontario.

Dr. Pascal also says that, "Establishing a strong foundation in the early years, and building on it is the single-most powerful key to Ontario's social and eco-

nomic future." We talk about the best future; we want that for our children. The best future we can have for our children is one that is "healthy and secure," he says. It's a future where students are "emotionally and socially competent." He talks about a future where students are "eager, confident and successful learners," and he talks about the respect of the "diversity of their peers."

You know, we all want that. We all want that for our children. Those of us in the schools, on the front line—we know that. We want that for our children, and this government, since 2003, has taken enormous steps forward to provide that for our students. Today, Bill 242 is yet another positive step forward to support our young learners in our schools.

For children who attend, according to Dr. Pascal, his first recommendation is full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. So fast forward to the present. Here we are today, at second reading of Bill 242, talking about exactly that. One would hope that all parties would be onside, but we stand here this afternoon and we hear the opposition and the third party talk about all the glitches, looking for things to talk about. I'd like to take some time to actually address each of those and the facts that the people of Ontario deserve.

The Premier has recently announced this full-day learning program. I'd like to quote the Premier. He says:

"We're excited about this program. It's the first of its kind in North America. It's about ensuring that our children have every opportunity they need to prepare them for more advanced learning that takes place in grade 1.

"We know that this kind of a program will give our kids a better chance of not only completing high school, but going on to university, college or an apprenticeship program, landing a good job and enjoying a high quality of life....

"When we open our doors to full-day learning for our four- and five-year-olds, it's not just a matter of improving educational opportunities for our kids and guaranteeing or at least assuring their greater success at school. It's also about building a stronger economy." It's about building a strong foundation for a strong economy and a globalized, knowledge-based economy.

I want to talk about how Bill 242 affects my riding directly. My riding of Kitchener-Conestoga is a wonderful compilation of a rural setting, of the three townships of Woolwich, Wellesley and Wilmot, and it's coupled and paired with the urban south Kitchener. How exciting is that, when we're looking at full-day learning for young learners who need additional support, who need to have the support of the publicly funded education system? In one of my townships, there's the small town of Floradale, an interesting compilation of Mennonites. The school has recently flourished. We have a larger attendance, and the community is thriving. The principal at Floradale Public School, Leslie McNabb, has said this about full-day learning:

"We are excited and pleased to be implementing full-day, every-day kindergarten in the first phase. The

majority of our school population are English-language learners, and they enter kindergarten with either no or minimal English-language literacy. Our population also does not have proficiency in their first language, because it is not written or read. We believe full-day, every-day kindergarten will allow our students greater success in acquiring their basic literacy skills and will allow them to be in a better literacy position when they enter grade 1.”

1720

I thank Principal McNabb for that, who is on the front lines and who can see the effect that this has and will have on our young learners.

Megan Conway is the director of Pathways to Education in Kitchener. Megan says of full-day learning: “Giving students the opportunity to be in school and learn more at an early age is a really important step towards guaranteeing greater success down the road. I’m enthused by this bill that works to give students the supports they need at an earlier age.”

I’m being cognizant of the time. I have more to share from local, on-the-ground constituents and what they have to say about full-day learning. I did want to share with you the perspective on Bill 242 of a director of education. Linda Fabi is the director of education with the Waterloo Region District School Board, and Linda says, “We welcome this program model as a positive addition to the existing outstanding kindergarten programs in our board and throughout” the province of “Ontario.” Our “families will benefit from the optional before and after school program and the kindergarten children will have fewer transitions in their day. This is an exciting opportunity for Waterloo region and our youngest students.” We thank director Fabi for those comments.

Here is the part where I look at some of the feedback that we’re getting from the opposition here today. This is where I give you the facts and dispel the myths.

The opposition has said that there are concerns about the growing boards and accommodating full-day learning classes at some schools that are bursting at the seams. In our first year we’re implementing early learning in schools that already have space to accommodate the additional classes. We realize there will be a need for new or renovated spaces, but most boards can accommodate phase two of the early learning program in the existing space without the need for immediate capital funding.

But on that note, since the fall of 2008 the ministry has put more money in for new schools and additions to allow local school boards to construct any additional space that may be needed.

This is one of my favourites. The opposition is saying, “Given the current economic environment, this is not the right time for implementing full-day learning.” I tell you, the time is now. There is a Chinese proverb that says, “Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still.” I tell you, in education, with the official opposition and the third party, we stood still for years and years in our schools with our young learners. That is

behind us. The province of Ontario is moving forward with full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, giving four- and five-year-olds an earlier start on their learning. It improves their reading, writing and math skills. It provides a smoother transition to grade 1, and that has proven to show success in subsequent and further years. Establishing a strong foundation for early years is a powerful key to not only social success for our students but, of course, for the economic future of the province.

Another comment we’ve heard from the opposition: The third party has expressed concerns about the lack of direction the government has provided to teachers and ECEs in terms of collaboration in the classroom. Honestly, under Bill 242, the proposed new duty to co-operate is intended to provide recognition that the roles of teachers and ECEs would overlap in the early learning program, and where they’re working today, the two professionals would be expected to coordinate their activities, which is what we do in schools.

I think it’s important to iterate clearly that these are processes, these are clear steps that the government is taking. I think we have to dispel the myths that we hear from the opposition.

The obligation to co-operate with school staff already exists in the act for teachers, and, of course, we will expect that there will be that working relationship with the ECE workers as well.

We’ve implemented a number of measures to ensure the implementation is as smooth as possible. We’ve looked at this in detail. We’re having an implementation advisory team in place. What is an implementation advisory team? It’s comprised of stakeholders. For instance, it could be teachers, federations, boards of education, ECEs.

We also heard today the question of salaries for ECEs, so I want to get right to the facts on that as well. ECE salaries will be determined at the board level. The ministry looked at a variety of different hourly rates across the province, both inside as well as outside the education sector, and determined a competitive funding benchmark. The rate will be determined in order to ensure that we strike a balance, of course, between stabilizing the child care sector and making sure that school boards are still able to attract qualified ECEs.

Any concerns we may have heard from the opposition about providing extended-day services coming at the expense of daycare providers—we realize that four- and five-year-olds moving to the extended day in schools will have an impact on child care. This is why we’ve asked school boards to work with municipalities, we’ve asked school boards to work with Best Start networks in order to consider what the local impact will be on their child care in selecting their first sites, and they’ve done that. The government continues to work with municipalities to help stabilize child care services for children under four years of age during the implementation of early learning.

What else did we hear? Subsidies—we heard that from the third party just within the hour. Currently, the subsidy system and wait lists for child care are managed by—I

hope the member is listening; this is what he was asking—the 47 consolidated municipal service managers and the district social service administration boards in Ontario. The legislation would provide the government with the authority to enter into agreements regarding fee subsidy with municipalities and, of course, with other partners.

Selecting schools in high-priority areas is another issue that I think is worthy of discussion. School boards best understand the needs in their communities; there is no doubt about that. Boards were asked to look at and consider their local needs, the needs of their school communities and of their larger communities. At the same time, they were also looking at working with municipalities to discover what the needs were. They worked with their coterminous boards as well. At that point, the recommendations were reviewed.

An interesting point: More than half of phase one schools are in communities that demonstrate the highest need. So approximately 60% of phase one schools are in high need areas, as defined according to the low-income cut-off data. Again, it's all about balance. It's a balance between available space and consulting with boards and the criteria they need to look at in order to meet the needs of their particular communities.

We also heard the opposition trying to argue that staggering the introduction of early learning into schools is inequitable. We need to make sure that our progress is responsible; we need to make sure that our progress is affordable, obviously, given the current economic climate. We will continue to phase this in over time.

I'd be remiss if I didn't say we have come a long way. And we're not standing still, as we were under two previous governments. We have invested over \$5 billion to restore the schools since those days, and that investment is despite 106,000 fewer students.

I'm cognizant of time, Speaker.

The other thing we heard was a concern about investing in special ed funding. To the opposition, in fact we have increased special ed funding in our schools by over \$627 million since we took government in 2003. That is absolutely staggering and impressive. That's a 39% increase. The 2009-10 funding is projected to increase by \$49 million. I sure hope that they're listening because I think this sets the record straight.

I did want to share a quote with you from Sid Ryan and the perspective of CUPE. CUPE says that, "Full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds is the right kind of investment in Ontario's future and will succeed as long as all concerned parties are part of its implementation." Sid Ryan is president of CUPE, and he says, "This fundamental change in early learning is the right thing to do for our children and for our communities." He goes on to say, "I have to congratulate the provincial government for looking at the long term and moving forward with an investment in the future that will help stimulate the economy by creating new permanent jobs and tackling poverty."

I could quote to you for the next long time, but I won't put you through that, Speaker. But I did want to leave

you with a comment from me because here's what I have—from me; you did not see that coming. The comment that I have to say about Ontario's future as an educator and as a parent is that Ontario's future walks through the doors of our schools every day, and Bill 242 is essential.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 242, full-day learning legislation.

As a former teacher, education is something that is very important to me. Since the Ontario government announced the full-day learning program, I have heard from many parents in my riding of Mississauga-Brampton South, at my office and at events, who are very enthusiastic and very happy about the full-day learning program.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of visiting St. Valentine Elementary School in my riding of Mississauga-Brampton South. St. Valentine is one of nearly 600 schools that will place about 35,000 children in full-day learning programs starting this September. By launching a full-day learning program, we are laying the foundation of a stronger workforce. If this legislation is passed, we are enabling our children to reach their full potential so that they can compete and win against the best in this world.

Another important part of this legislation is, we are empowering school boards to implement extended daycare programs before and after school. This will provide children a seamless day, and it will make learning easier for our children. It will make life easier for parents. They don't have to juggle between work, school and daycare. They can focus on their job. That will enhance productivity and, in turn, boost our economy.

This is a win-win situation. It is the right thing to do. It is the best thing to do. It is the best public policy. I urge all members of this House to support—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I listened to the comments of my colleague and neighbour to the north and I thank her for an excellent presentation on behalf of the government on Bill 242.

There's only one thing wrong with that bill—because no one can really state that the earlier we start our children in the educational system, the better it will be for their and our future. Unfortunately, by hastily throwing \$1.5 billion into the pot for this particular project, we've forgotten those children who have special needs. We've forgotten our special education programs that are woefully underfunded. There are lawsuits going on where people, parents, are trying to protect their children and are asking this government, "Please, please, help us, because otherwise our child will never grow up to be a working member of our society. Please help us," and our Premier has turned his back on these cries for help across this province. He may be remembered for that.

Another problem with the program as they set it up: It starts haves and have-nots once again. It's very diffi-

cult—this is a big province—but a lot of people are going to be disappointed because they will not be getting the same services in their community.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am pleased to stand in support of Bill 242 today and comment on the wonderful speech by my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga.

One of the things that I think is actually the strength of our full-day learning program for four- and five-year-olds is that it is a massive undertaking—we admit that—but we are going to roll it in over several years; we're going to phase in the implementation, and we'll have time to think about it and get it right.

But when we went to the boards and asked which schools they were going to do first, we said, "First of all, you need to have space in the school." But we also said, "Secondly, boards, we'd like you to work together and we'd like to have you look at those schools that are perhaps located in neighbourhoods that have the greatest risk, where this program will have the greatest impact."

I know in my riding of Guelph I was absolutely thrilled to see the way the two boards worked together, the Upper Grand District School Board and the Wellington Catholic District School Board, because between the two of them—four programs in Upper Grand, two programs at Wellington Catholic—they in fact selected six neighbourhoods in Guelph, each of which has some areas of their catchment area where there are communities where there are really some challenges with people living in poverty and with a lot of high immigration rates—some real challenges. The board selected those schools where the program will have the greatest impact, because, contrary to what the member from Cambridge is saying, we know that this program will have a huge impact on giving kids a head start and making sure that kids with the greatest risk get the greatest impact from this program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I wanted to comment on the member from Kitchener–Conestoga because I know she's a principal from a high school in that area on leave and she's very genuinely committed to doing the right thing.

Here's my point: I think there's a lot of agreement here, believe it or not. We all agree that this is a very well-intended policy enhancement for the people of Ontario, and I think we also agree that there's not a satisfactory amount of money to implement it adequately at this time. That's why they've chosen to phase it in over five and 10 years, so some parts of Ontario will get it and some won't.

The fairness issue is really where we're landing on this. In a time when they're underfunding class sizes, special education, transportation and busing—the funny thing is that we agree with it, but in all fairness, they're imputing motive on our part which is not well founded.

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If you think back to the Fraser Mustard report and you think back to the early learning provisions that we did under the Royal Commission on Learning, much of that was commissioned and begun under our government, and those who don't admit that know not of what they speak.

On this file, we are clearly on the record saying it's the right thing at the wrong time. The time would be to continue with the early learning centres and to do the proper parenting skills in the community and the resource centres for children and families in the communities. Give more options to the families. Give more options to the communities.

These school programs—lunch and after-school programs—are run, in many cases, by volunteers. Work with the operators today to provide more resources in an affordable environment, but keep moving forward with early learning provisions. That's my contribution.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga has up to two minutes to respond, but before she does, I remind members that the acoustics in this chamber are very good, so anything above low speaking is heard all the way across and then I have trouble hearing the member.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Lovely. Thank you, Speaker. My colleague is laughing at me for saying "Lovely," but it was lovely.

I wanted to thank the member from Mississauga–Brampton South, who talks about helping students to compete and win. Yes, that's what this is about. I want to address the members from Cambridge, Guelph and Durham: Thank you for your comments as well.

We are taking a measured, metered layout. In response to the member from Cambridge: The time, in fact, is now. We waited and walked the picket line under your government. I was a teacher at that time. We will never go back. The time to help our students is now, and we are doing that. I am proud of the McGuinty government for doing that and continuing to commit to education in the province of Ontario.

To the member from Guelph: I want to thank you for all of your commitment and dedication to education over the years. The rollout will occur over years so that, yes, we will have the time to think about it and to get it right. Thank you for all of your hard work. Thank you to the member for all of her hard work on Bill 242, and thank you on behalf of all of the students of Ontario.

I think we need to go back for one more comment that we heard from the opposition about special ed funding. I did mention it in my 20-minute discussion, but I'll go back to it. We have increased special ed funding by over \$627 million since 2003—a 39% increase in special ed funding. Again, to the member, in 2009-10, funding is projected to increase by \$49 million to a provincial total of over \$2.25 billion.

Again, I'd just say that Ontario's future walks through the doors of our schools every day. Schools are where the kids are. That's where we are investing to make a difference in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm really pleased to speak today on Bill 242, which is the bill that amends the Education Act to provide for the operation of junior kindergarten and kindergarten on a full-day basis; the operation of extended day programs outside the hours of junior kindergarten and kindergarten; and also the appointment of early childhood educators to positions in junior kindergarten and kindergarten and in these extended day programs.

In the summer of 2009, Dr. Charles Pascal proudly delivered his report and recommendations that he had been working on for a couple of years. I wonder what Dr. Pascal is thinking right now and how disappointed he must be at how badly botched this program has turned out to be.

What can the McGuinty Liberal government be thinking by admitting that this program is going to cost, when it's full-blown out, \$1.5 billion, when they clearly have no money and no plan today? Where is this money coming from? Can we expect this number to grow, since no funding has been announced about the refurbishment of classrooms, the physical space needs to accommodate these new programs? This piecemeal approach to how we deliver important programs, programs that are here for the long term that are going to affect the children in our province in how they learn and move forward and affect the people who teach them—and we have no real plan. All we have is an announcement.

So here is the pattern: Once again, we have a great idea. Who can argue with the idea that's been presented? Who can argue with Dr. Pascal? The argument is, there is no real plan. How do you execute this? The merit in this and the vulnerability of the success in this is that the intentions are good but the execution is non-existent. There is no plan.

Our party believes that this government cannot afford \$1.5 billion in a new program today. This government is faced with an almost \$25-billion, record-breaking deficit. It has been months since the McGuinty Liberals revealed that they had run the province into this \$25-billion deficit. To date, we have heard absolutely no plan—not one, single meaningful restraint measure—in order to deal with this record-breaking deficit. Without a plan to reduce it, how can we now expect to be introducing spending of this magnitude on a program that isn't even recognizable from the recommendations that Dr. Pascal made? Without a plan to reduce the deficit, we shouldn't be making these kinds of announcements.

Where is the money coming from? Does anybody on the government side of the House know? Where is this money coming from? Ontarians are interested to know about this. They want an affordable approach to this plan because their kids are going to be on the front line.

This announcement is coming at a time when special education funding is insufficient to respond to the most vulnerable students in our system. The transportation file is also significantly underfunded. The funding formulas

for special education and the transportation file need to be reviewed immediately, before we start injecting new programs that cost more.

Do you know what happens? School boards are left robbing Peter to pay Paul. They will be left to do even more complicated juggling acts in their budgets, and it leaves the system vulnerable. There is no detail of implementation, simply that a few schools, some winners—and there are a lot more losers—are going to have the program this September. Once again, this government is moving forward on an initiative as important as this, with a magnitude of financial burden that this is going to bring, without a plan.

These programs are about photo ops, the Premier's wannabe legacy as the education Premier, the green Premier—hence his recently signed deal worth millions of dollars with Samsung, which means exorbitant energy prices for all Ontarians. It seems that this Premier's legacy is going to be hard on the wallets of all Ontarians: It's going to be increased taxes, increased user fees, increased energy costs, on top of the HST and what other surprises we may find in the spring budget.

The McGuinty Liberals have a pattern of throwing money at an initiative, enjoying that photo op, and leaving anyone but themselves to sort out the details, whether it's the unfortunate LHINs in the health care system—and in this case, it's going to be the school boards. It's always left to somebody else to clean up the mess and make the difficult decision.

Full-day JK and SK is a complex issue. There are significant challenges around this implementation, and the cost is huge. This is a program that some school board trustees are calling “one of the most ill-conceived and badly thought-through programs that the province has ever announced.” This is coming from someone who's going to have to deal with the mess after it has been implemented. This program creates unequal access, since some parents will have access to the program—and they'll have it this year in September 2010—while others are just going to have to continue to pay children's day-care costs for an indefinite period of time.

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Ontarians are tired of Mr. McGuinty's winner and loser approach. Just like the HST, where seniors and young families are compromised in order to get a \$3-billion tax grab, some parents are going to have to wait for access for who knows how long, and they will have to wait while their neighbours' kids are receiving that same program. The government has not indicated which schools will start the program in 2011, 2012, 2013 and beyond. All we know is that the program is starting in September 2010. The government will be phasing in all-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds. In the first year, only 580 schools will offer the program. There's a website showing a list of these schools, and already people in my community are saying “How come not me?” And “When will I get it? Why do I have to wait? How do I plan for my family?”

Our education critic mentioned that there are going to be children living in communities side by side where one

may go to the separate school and another one to the public school. One parent will have to continue to pay for their child care, but the other one will not. This is creating some concerns in the communities across this province, and certainly I have received some calls.

Parents have also contacted our education critic, indicating that they have concerns about not knowing when their child will qualify for this program and how they feel that there is some unfairness in the way the program is being rolled out. How do they plan for their family? How do they do that in-family planning for these most important issues to know where and when their child will be looked after?

There's a broken promise here, another broken promise. This government promised to cap class sizes at 20 students per class. By the Premier's own admission, this will now increase to 26 students for our youngest learners. What explanation does Mr. McGuinty have for this? How are the McGuinty Liberals going to keep their promises to keep class sizes capped at 20 students per class when this will increase class sizes to 26 students? That's a difference of six students. There's no magic here; do the math.

Is it fair that now school boards will be saddled with the decisions of who's going to be in full-day kindergarten and who isn't? You know what they've had to do? They've had to indicate to our constituents that this may be by a lottery system. What a shoddy way to deal with education for our children here in Ontario—a lottery system. Shame.

There are some things that are not optional. I don't know whether Ontarians understand that this program leaves little choice for parents who want only a half-day program for their child when they begin school, so let me explain this. If parents live in the catchment area of full-day kindergarten, they will not have a choice to send their child to a half-day program because the school now offers only the full-day program. Now we have taken choice away from parents. That isn't even democratic.

How are the McGuinty Liberals going to explain to families that won't have access to the programs why they were left out? The promise was made to all families that there will be full-day junior and senior kindergarten, and now families have found that there are winners and losers. Some have been picked; some have not. This is not acceptable to Ontario families. You will find that out once it's implemented and school begins in September 2010; the uprising will occur.

How are the McGuinty Liberals going to tackle what children in full-day kindergarten classes are learning in comparison to what children in half-day kindergarten classes are learning? How are you going to test that? What are the comparables going to be? How flexible are you going to be in that?

Again, a great idea: Support the kids; give them every advantage of early learning. Badly executed, Mr. Speaker. Very badly executed.

Has the Premier reconciled how this will affect the organizations that deliver lunchtime and after-school programs? These organizations have been left in the lurch. Nobody talked to them about what happens after full-day junior and senior kindergarten is implemented. When is that process going to take place? These were partners in our schools, partnered with the school boards to make sure that children who remained in school for the full day had the care they needed by responsible people. No one has talked to them; again, a pattern in this government. Nobody speaks to people who are delivering services. Great ideas come forward, photo ops happen, but that's it.

As I said in the beginning, Mr. Speaker, good intentions, poor execution.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm going to have to refer to my clock.

It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock, February 25.

The House adjourned at 1757.

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		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
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Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
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Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
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Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
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of Ontario**

First Session, 39th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 25 February 2010

Jeudi 25 février 2010



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 25 February 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 25 février 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Buddhist prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters/ Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly it's a pleasure to rise today in the House, and it's going to be, I warn everyone, a historic moment. I'm about to say something that I've never said before and probably—well, who knows?—may never say again. So put aside your crossword puzzles, drop the clippings, and those who are watching at home, turn up the volume and maybe switch channels from the 150th replay of last night's game and listen, because I'm going to say that for once the McGuinty government has done something very good.

Applause.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I know. What can one say? I see Sophia over there beaming, the Minister of Consumer Services—congratulations; by the way, Minister of Agriculture, congratulations to you too.

Certainly this is something that we, as New Democrats, wanted to see and have been really pressing for a long time. I can't remember a time personally when, as a feminist, I haven't been struggling for more child care, which is really what we're speaking about here, because, quite frankly, women's rights hinge on having an adequate child care program in this province.

Now, of course, you know there are going to be caveats. You know that this isn't the full story yet, and far from it, because we're still dealing with women who have two-year-olds and three-year-olds and even four-year-olds, where they need help, and even the four- and five-year-old program, of course, we feel is going to be phased in a little too slowly and will not extend to everybody yet; we understand that. But way, way back in the 1970s, I remember asking for free universal, accessible child care. Because without it, women simply will never have equality. That is a huge piece of this puzzle. We could also, and I will, talk about how it affects children—and it's always positive. The experience of other countries and other jurisdictions is always positive, when the government steps into this.

I look to neighbours who still, we in the New Democratic Party think, do it better. Manitoba has \$17-a-day child care. Quebec, with a Liberal government, has \$7-a-day child care. These, we feel, are better models, and they're paying for themselves. I'll talk about that as well. But, hey, this is a step, and we have to celebrate it, even though it's not the whole story.

Certainly Sid Ryan, head of CUPE and now the OFL, said it best when he said, "The best way to keep our eyes on the prize is to involve all concerned parties in the implementation of this new program. That means parents, schools, school- and community-based child care agencies, ECEs and teachers and the unions that represent them. Particularly, the province must take care not to disrupt existing child care programs as we go through the transition to an integrated, seamless day." So says the new head of the OFL. He's right. Those are some of the problems the government is going to face as this gets phased in. Like any new program, it's going to have some kinks. And of course we in the New Democratic Party will be there to assist the government, to call the government to account, to actually try to pave the way so that this works well and gets spread out across the province quickly. We would like to see this spread out across the province a little bit more quickly than the government has on its agenda.

I have to say that in my own riding of Parkdale-High Park we've seen tragedies, in fact in part because of the lack of adult oversight of our children and adult care for our children. I think here in particular of the tragic case of Katelynn Sampson. Here is a case of a little girl who went missing from school for several months. There were not enough—and there are still not enough, quite frankly—adults in our schools, adults who have oversight over our children. So the school did what they could. They did

everything they could. They phoned; they were told that she was back on the reservation. They had no people to send to check out the factuality of that submission. So they had to go on the caregivers' word—caregivers who were far from caregivers, who were in fact murderers. But they didn't know that then. Had we more adults in the school system, they would have been able to send somebody out. But also, had we had more child care—after school, before school, and for four- and five-year-olds—at that point, Katelynn would have had some contacts in the community. She would have been known by adults in the community, and her absence would have been noted and there would have been follow-up. This is a little life that might have been saved had there been adequate daycare supports, had there been adequate daycare supports for four- and five-year-olds, had there been adequate after-school and before-school daycare supports—and of course the supports would have had to be free or at very low cost, because we're talking about a family that had very little money, a mother who wrestled with health issues of her own and was unable to look after her daughter.

So there is a classic case, a case of a death that might, just might, have been averted had there been more adults watching, more adults able to follow up and to find out what was going on in that household, where that little girl really was: Was what the so-called caregivers said true, or not? That's something that we live with in Parkdale—High Park still. As I pass her mother on the street, probably at least once a week, I'm reminded of it. So, again, universal, accessible, free daycare is what we should all be aiming for, to protect women, to allow women to achieve equality, which we don't have yet in this province, and to protect our children. It's something we're not doing yet for our children, although this is a step toward that.

0910

Certainly, when I walked into this place—and I don't know if I'm alone in this, but I'm sure all women, as they walk into this place, are struck by a couple of noted details. Number one, that there are no—there are actually only two representations of women on the two public floors of Queen's Park. Although there are dozens of portraits of men, there are only two women depicted. One is Agnes Macphail—that's a bust of her as you walk up the stairs—and the other is the Queen. That's it. Everybody else's picture is a picture of a man.

Now, what does that say to our girl children as they walk in here on school tours? Well, it says that this place is the domain of men. Quite frankly, it is the domain of men. There are only about 24% of us who are female in this place.

Why is that? I would certainly say that part of it is the lack of child care. We are a symbolic representation of what goes on in the rest of the province. There is no child care for MPPs present at Queen's Park. Why not? I mean, if it were only symbolic, it would be important. It would be important if it were only symbolic. Because what we're saying to young women—not to women whose

children have grown up—is that there's no place for you here.

If you have children, you've got to choose: either your children's welfare or political life. Because quite frankly, political life takes 12 to 14 hours a day. We all know that. And if there isn't accessible child care on-site where, between meetings and sessions of the House, we can go and see our children and interact with them, it's no place for a young woman, this place.

That's still the case, and I would really ask of the government that they look at that, that they look at the symbolism of not having child care for sitting MPPs, of having nothing but pictures of men on the first two floors of this building. The symbolic nature of that has real ramifications.

What are the ramifications for women, again, because of the lack of child care? We still only make 71 cents for every dollar made by men. That's the reality. That really hasn't changed much in decades. Why is that?

Again, look at the vast majority of folk who take time off on leave to look after their children. The vast majority of them are women. In their most productive professional years they have to take a year off, or sometimes more—many women take more—when men are still working. And those productive lags are what hurt women. Why do they have to take that time off, or why do they need to? Because again, there's not a child care around the corner that they feel really confident leaving their children with.

We're not talking here about what is increasingly happening in this province, which is a privatization of child care. Most women, most families, most men don't want to leave their child anywhere just so they can go to work. They want to be assured that if they are leaving their child, they're going to be educated, loved and cared for, and that it's going to be an enriching experience, not a depleting experience.

I can't tell you—and I know all the MPPs share in this—the number of times I've knocked on apartment buildings and houses where, clearly, there is unlicensed, unregulated child care happening, and what you see is a group of little kids watching TV. That's what you see. Is that the future of children in this province? I hope not.

Here is a step forward—not adequate, but it's a step forward. As I said, it's a historic moment that I would be saying anything good about this government, but I am. Who knew?

If we look at Charles Pascal's notes to the government, if we look at his report, we note a number of interesting details. First of all, we note that he made a number of recommendations—not only the one that the government followed up on, but a number of ones, and he made them for a reason. Because studies have shown—and across the board, really, there's no debate about it—that good child care, enriching child care, is good for people, and it's a great leveller. That is to say that children who are marginalized, who are racialized, who go into adequate, enriching, good child care actually get a step up. It helps them and it levels the playing field in terms of how they'll do in school later on and how they'll do later in life.

His recommendations: He said, first of all, "The province should create a continuum of early learning, child care, and family supports for children from the prenatal period through to adolescence, under the leadership of the Minister of Education."

That was recommendation number 1. Even the government will admit that hasn't happened yet. We're working toward that—I hear you—but it hasn't happened yet. I think again of Katelynn Sampson. Would that have helped? Of course it would have. It might have saved her life.

Number 2: "The Ministry of Education should establish an early years division to develop and implement an early years policy framework that will create a continuity of early learning experiences for children from 0 to 8 years of age."

We point out that although it's a good thing, this legislation only affects four- and five-year-olds, not younger children. Again, there's work to be done, a great deal of work to be done there.

Number 3 is the one recommendation the government has acted on, and what we see is what we get: "a two-year, full-day early learning program prior to grade 1, available to all children."

Not quite all children, however; not quite phased in the way we'd like to see it; perhaps not quite funded the way we'd like to see it—a great question mark hanging over this piece of legislation is where the money will come from. Again, New Democrats will fully support this, assist where we can and push where we can to make sure that it rolls out the way it should.

Number 3: "The early years policy framework should also guide the transformation of programming for Ontario's youngest learners. Municipal authorities, with the necessary resources, should be mandated to plan, develop, support, and monitor an integrated network of Best Start child and family centres providing" children with—and here's where we see the great gap:

"—flexible, part-time/full-day/full-year early learning/care options for children up to age 4," says Dr. Pascal;

"—prenatal and postnatal information and supports"—again, I think of these marginalized children, born to parents who are marginalized, and wonder where those postnatal supports are; I know that our social workers and social work agencies do their best, but they're not funded to the tune that would accommodate this;

"—parenting and family support programming, including home visiting, family literacy, and play groups"—home visiting was something completely absent in the poor, short life of Katelynn Sampson;

"—nutrition and nutrition counselling;

"—early identification and intervention resources;

"—links to special-needs treatment and community resources, including libraries, recreation and community centres, health care, family counselling, housing, language services, and employment/training services."

In fact, none of these early options are offered, and many of them, quite frankly, are threatened—I hope the government didn't plan it this way—in part because our

daycares now losing their four- and five-year-olds also suffer a financial hit.

Again, I read the article today about the Minister of Education, as did everybody, and this was raised in that article, which was otherwise quite glowing. It said, "What is the government going to do?" And the government threw this back on the daycare operators and said, "Well, maybe they'll take more younger children." But, as we know, the reality is that the younger the child, the more early childhood educators you need to run the daycare, so it changes the financial model of our daycares. That's problematic.

Coupled with that, as we all know, is the serious problem we're facing with the lack of federal funding. Toronto is looking at cutting maybe 5,000 daycare spaces because the federal funds aren't flowing. So that, coupled with this, is extremely problematic for those folk in Ontario. Remember that the stats are horrendous in this province: Only one out of 10 children currently has a child care spot, and it costs over \$1,000 a month on average. I contrast that with Manitoba's \$17 a day and Quebec's \$7 a day. This is a problem, and this may make it worse. In fact, there are signs that it's making it worse right now.

So all I would do is caution my friends across the aisle and say, please, if we bring this in, let it not be at the expense of daycare spaces for younger children, because we need to guarantee those; in fact, we need to add to those. In fact, we need a daycare policy. And there, I know, this government always points at the federal government, as they do on so many issues, and says, "You go first." Well, where daycare is concerned, that's just not good enough; where women are concerned, that's just not good enough; where children are concerned, that's just not good enough; and certainly where Katelynn Sampson was concerned, it was far from good enough.

0920

Let's go on. Charles Pascal also made some other recommendations. He said: "Under the systems management of municipal authorities, the direct operation of Best Start child and family centres could be provided by local or regional governments, school boards, post-secondary institutions, or non-profit agencies."

It's a good dream, but we know here, and certainly they know at the municipal level, that they simply don't have the funds to do that. So if we are to ask them to do that, in light of Dr. Pascal's recommendations, then we need to give them the funds to be able to do that.

"Non-profit and commercial providers may continue to operate licensed child care in accordance"—goes on Dr. Pascal, in recommendation number 7—"with current program standards. All service expansion would take place through Best Start child and family centres and school boards."

Unfortunately, although we tried, we didn't get a comment about this recommendation from this government. Again, I would challenge the government to give us a comment on that. What do they think of that recommendation? I mean, it's in the same report. What are they going to do about it?

The eighth recommendation: "The expectations set out in the Early Years policy framework should be operationalized through local Early Years service plans developed by municipal authorities in partnership with school boards and community partners. Outcomes and targets should be developed through provincial-municipal collaboration and funding flowed through municipal authorities and school boards to meet targets."

This is quite a substantial recommendation. This really gets to the hub of the problem with daycare in our province. Again, unfortunately, there has been no action from the government.

Really, we see here that this is a government that has done a piece of the job. It's an important piece—we'll give them that. As I said, it's not often that I stand here and give kudos to my friends across the aisle, but I am doing that today. I don't want to detract from that; I'm doing that today. But it's only the very first step. It has to be done carefully, in consultation with the daycare operators, so as to not cost these precious and rare daycare spots.

Also, and most importantly, it's not the full answer to daycare in the province of Ontario. We still need to see from this government a program so that women can go to work on equal footing with men; so that children can be protected, not just from four years old and up but from two years old and up, one and a half years old and up; so that women, finally, can get back to work on the same level playing field as men, which is absolutely not the case right now, as exemplified by this place in and of itself, Queen's Park, that is called the Pink Palace in name only but certainly isn't very pink when it comes to women's rights.

Women from all parties: We should be working together on this. This should not be a partisan issue. We should be calling on both our own caucuses and also the government of the day, which happens to be, quite frankly, yours, in the Liberal Party, to make this the first step only and to go on to a full daycare program. Don't wait for the feds. You'll wait forever. You know that. Work now to make sure that our children are protected and to make sure that all of the recommendations of Dr. Pascal are implemented, not just recommendation number 3.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate. It's great to hear the remarks from the member from Parkdale-High Park, and it's great to hear that she'll be supporting this and has added constructive suggestions. It is a bill that's worthy of support, and I think that it takes some courage sometimes to stand up and say that the government's getting something right. In this sense, for a member of the opposition to do that I think speaks to the quality of the bill.

Mr. Michael Prue: We're waiting for you to tell us you've done something wrong.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Well, the member seems quite good at telling us when we've done something wrong, so I really did appreciate it.

About 20 years ago, I was chair of the child care committee in the region of Halton. At that time, it was an unusual role for a man to take. Quite simply, I was chair of that committee because I had a son, because I was a father. I found that when my wife and I were continuing in our careers, our son was put into a fractured system—that he spent part of the morning somewhere, he got picked up by a bus and then got taken to school, then somebody came back to pick him up at noon in a bus, then he went to a child care centre and stayed there until about six.

There were still people back then, and probably still people around, that called child care glorified babysitting, something that was unnecessary and the state shouldn't involve itself in it, but I think we've evolved as a society since that time. It has led to the introduction of a bill that I think speaks to the principle of a system that's not just good for the economy but is actually good for the kids themselves. It brings together two professions we've come to rely on over the years to work in harmony in the best interests of our young children, specifically four- and five-year-olds. It brings the teaching profession and the early childhood educators together to work in the best interests of our children. So it makes Ontario a leader.

It's something we should be supporting. I appreciate the support from the member from Parkdale-High Park, and I hope the bill receives support from all members of the House at the end of the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I thank the member. I spoke to her earlier this morning about her remarks—and a commendable job in Parkdale-High Park.

I think the clippings this morning are a good indication—I spoke on this issue yesterday. I like the issue here from the Brampton Expositor. I won't read this, but it says there are many questions about how the program will work: "School boards have been told they must provide before- and after-school care for these young students, but not how administration and operating costs for the after-hours service will be covered. Cash-strapped school boards also don't know who will cover extra expenses for lighting, heating, transportation and school cleaning" etc. "and how care will be provided on non-school days, including PA days, March break and during the summer." These are really important questions about implementation. I think they should pause and get it right.

Grand Erie trustee Don Werden "called the plan to have school boards provide before- and after-school care 'a disaster waiting to happen.'" Imagine exposing our children to these risks.

Jim Wibberley, Grand Erie's director of education, "has complained that 'we are not only going to be a board of education, but a board of child care.'" From the same article: "Child care centre operators say the children in their programs for four- and five-year-olds help to subsidize the cost of space for younger children. When thousands of children move from child care centres to

full-day kindergarten, the cost for spaces for babies and toddlers, who require more care, is expected to go up.”

They're actually not resolving this issue. This is a legacy issue of the Premier; that's all this really is. It's not fairly implemented, and I would like to have more time to draw to the attention of the public—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to celebrate what my colleague from Parkdale–High Park had to say. Yes, we in the New Democratic Party are going to support this, but we have the opportunity, and I think we have the right, to be critical at the same time. We need to point out that although this is a good program, Dr. Pascal has made a number of recommendations, of which the government has seen fit, to this point in time, to only implement or attempt to implement one of them.

My colleague from Parkdale–High Park was impassioned and she was reasoned, and in my view she gave a really holistic approach to what has to happen. It is all well and good to give full-day kindergarten to four- and five-year-olds, but what about the other children? What about those who require daycare? What about those moms, particularly single moms who need to have subsidized daycare in order to contribute to this society and go out and work? Surely if the province of Quebec can provide daycare for \$7 a day or the province of Manitoba can provide it for \$17 a day, then the government of Ontario needs to look at this approach as well.

I know we might be unique in going down the road to full-day kindergarten, but we need to look at our daycare situation. It is not adequate; it has never been adequate. I don't know how many times people in the New Democratic Party have had to stand up over the years and ask for a better daycare plan. We've done it for all of the eight years I've been here, and I know they were doing it before I was here. It's not happening, and it needs to happen. If we are to be truly a progressive province, if we are truly going to help women and children, then we have to go that next step.

So although I will be supporting the legislation, I concur with my colleague from Parkdale–High Park that we need to do more. When that “more” is done, then we can truly say we are a progressive province.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure to join the debate. I had the opportunity yesterday to speak at length on Bill 242, but it's wonderful to be able to stand up and respond to the member from Parkdale–High Park, who spoke very well this morning. I thought I would just go back in support for the comments that she made. She began her eloquent speech this morning by saying that the government has done something right, and I thank her for that. This is the right thing to do for the children of Ontario.

In response to the first opposition yesterday, and we heard it again this morning, I must reiterate that the time

is now. We saw them stall it years ago, and we never want to go back. So I thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for her comments this morning.

We also support her comments about the effect of low-income neighbourhoods. More than half of the phase one schools are in communities that do demonstrate the highest need. Approximately 60% of the phase one schools are in high-needs areas, which is according to the low-income cut-off data. So I thank her for her comments.

She also spoke at length about children and child care, and I thank her for that. On-the-ground support from someone who is out in the field every day in my riding in the Wilmot Family Resource Centre is Trisha Robinson, the executive director, who agrees. She says, “We can see that a number of children in our community will benefit from this program. Implementing it will also give increased credibility to early childhood educators in using their skills and education focused on this age group.”

And finally, the member from Parkdale–High Park talked about studies that show the importance of quality early learning, and again, an on-the-ground quote from a retired principal and chair of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, who says, “There's an old poster claiming that everything you needed to know you learned in kindergarten.” There is a lot of truth in that. The government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The honourable member for Parkdale–High Park has up to two minutes for her response.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to the members for Kitchener–Conestoga, Beaches–East York, Oakville, and Durham for their comments and their support.

Certainly we're coming up, in another week, to International Women's Day, to the march. I hope to see women from all political parties out there. It would be great. On that day, certainly, we're going to be hearing the same calls that we've heard every day for decades, literally decades, if not probably a century, which is for access to daycare for all women in Ontario and all women, quite frankly, across Canada. That has always been one of the demands. Does this bill meet that demand? No, of course, it doesn't, but it is a step forward, and I said as much.

What I would love to see, from taking the step forward, is a few more steps forward, that is, “Hey, we've got some momentum now. Let's start looking at the whole daycare issue. Let's start looking at what is happening to our two-year-olds, to our three-year-olds.”

Let's start looking at what is happening to the women in our communities: as my friend from Beaches–East York said, single mothers, but not just single mothers, married mothers, all mothers who want to go out to work and want to work on an equal footing with their male colleagues, who don't want to have to take a huge chunk of time off in the prime of their careers simply because they can't find adequate child care. This holds women back and it holds our children back, and as I pointed out in the tragic case of Katelynn Sampson, sometimes the

lack of adult oversight on our children's lives actually is harmful and terribly detrimental.

So, again, kudos on this move. We will make sure, as you know, as is our prerogative and our calling in the opposition, to hold your feet to the fire and make sure that this rolls out well. Certainly this will not be the last you hear from us, but for the time being, let's celebrate a little bit, and let's move forward from here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M. Phil McNeely: Il me donne plaisir ce matin de parler sur la loi 242. À Ottawa-Orléans et à Ottawa, généralement, et à travers la province, les écoles francophones ont déjà été en avant avec les journées pleines pour le « junior kindergarten » et le « kindergarten » dans nos écoles. Ils ont déjà prouvé que c'est bon pour les enfants, c'est bon pour les parents—

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: The member is giving a good speech, but I don't think he's giving the speech to anyone. Is a quorum present?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I would ask the Clerk to find out if a quorum is present.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): A quorum now being present, we'll continue the debate. The honourable member for Ottawa-Orléans.

M. Phil McNeely: Comme j'ai dit, les écoles francophones à Ottawa-Orléans—à Ottawa et à travers la province—ont déjà été en avant avec les journées pleines pour les jeunes enfants dans leurs écoles. Alors, c'est déjà vu comme quelque chose qui est très bon pour les parents, c'est très bon pour les enfants, et c'est comme ça, avec la nouvelle loi, qu'on va aller avec toutes les écoles en Ontario.

I was just saying in the other official language that is very prominent in Ottawa and in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans that the francophone schools have already gone ahead with full-day junior kindergarten and kindergarten and it has proved to be excellent for the kids and the parents. Certainly, it is a head start that we have, that we know the system works; we know it's great. So I'm pleased to speak today on Bill 242, the full-day learning.

I just think it's important to read a couple of quotes that you may have heard before:

"Full-day learning for our four- and five-year-old kids will better prepare them for grade 1. That gives them a better chance of finishing high school, going on to post-secondary education and getting a good job. And that's in everyone's interest." That was Dalton McGuinty.

That all ties in to Reaching Higher and the better achievements that we've achieved throughout our school system, the better graduation rates. This just adds to what we want to do in strengthening our education system in Ontario, giving our kids more chances to get better jobs when they graduate.

"By giving more children a better start on their education, we're giving them more chances to succeed. Investing in early learning is good for children, good for parents and good for Ontario." That was our former Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne. This is the reason we're doing it.

"Full-day learning will give children a stronger start during the early years that are so critical to their educational and social development. It's the right thing to do for the children and their families." That's Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services.

This is a tough year to start this in, we know that, but it is the right year. It is the right year to get this full-day kindergarten going.

I would just read some of the reasons why we have chosen the first schools to do this.

We looked at available space. School boards looked at which schools had classroom space available and did not require new additions or renovations.

The impact on existing local child care was looked at.

But I think the most important thing that was looked at was that school boards considered the various needs of all the communities they serve and how early learning could meet those needs. A portion of the phase one schools will serve low-income neighbourhoods. I think that is really important. Some parents can give their children a lot of that early learning; some parents are too caught up in trying to make a living, trying to survive in these tough economic times. So in looking at where the needs were greatest, I think this was a good place to start.

I don't have that much educational background. I did go to teachers' college back in the—well, I won't say which decade, but it was a long time ago. I taught school one year. I taught a rural school, 30 kids, and seven grades. It was a different approach to education. My own first years—in grade 1, of course, we walked a couple of miles to our school.

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Things are so different now. The kids are in need of a lot more attention than the parents of today can give them. I've discussed this with a good friend of my son's who is a teacher in eastern Ontario. She comes over and looks after our grandchildren sometimes, and she makes that whole activity a learning activity. She's looking forward to this. She's looking forward, as a kindergarten teacher, to working with an early childhood educator and giving these children the start they need in life, that important start that was talked about by the member for Parkdale-High Park. I thank her for all the support that she has given this program. It's not something that is easy to do. It wasn't an easy decision for this government, but it was the right decision.

Back a few years ago, that hockey player, that goalie, Ken Dryden, had a good program that was going to be excellent for this country. As things turned out, what we got was \$100 a month, which is not really making any impact on helping parents to give children the right start in life and for them to keep those two jobs which are essential in most households. I've had parents come in to

me and say that their alternatives weren't great. Two people working, the cost of daycare \$15,000 a year for one child—these costs were just too high for them to absorb. They would often have to make that decision—and often it would be the mother who would have to make the decision to not pursue that career. That's unfair.

This move forward by this government with the support of many people in opposition is the right move. It's going to put us in that position where our kids will get the right start. The value of those dollars invested will come back, according to some experts, sevenfold. So that's an important investment. What more important investment could one have than our children?

It's up to 35,000 four- and five-year-olds in nearly 1,400 classes around the country. At roughly 100 ridings, that means 600 schools. We will see how this support comes from the parents for these systems. We know it's there. I've only had good feedback from my community. I think that's the case with most parents. People know that these are tough economic times, that program dollars are difficult—but nobody in my riding is telling me that this is the wrong direction for us to go.

If passed, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, will provide school board staff, principals, teachers and early childhood educators with a clear framework for the government's full-day learning program to provide full-day JK and K on every instructional day in every calendar year in every elementary school according to the approved model and to provide extended day care according to the approved model led by the ECE.

With the early childhood educators teaching in these classrooms, the classroom size will go up to approximately 26, but the person per child will be down to 13 to one. That's even better than the 20 to 1. It will give the kids the attention they need, the support they need and will certainly move Ontario into that situation where we've got it started and now we have to take it forward and make it across the board for every child who enters school.

These are some quotes that I've been given by people: "We are pleased to see early childhood education move forward in Ontario with the combined strength of a team of both early childhood educators and teachers.... With registered early childhood educators in the classrooms, children will get the full benefit of education during these critical early years." That's Lois Mahon, president of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

"We commend the government for its commitment to the welfare of young children. The decision took a lot of courage in today's economic environment, but it will pay a lifetime of rewards, not only for children, but for our communities and for our economy." That's Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

"We applaud the government for its leadership and improving education opportunities and services to children and their families....

"Teachers welcome early childhood educators ... as part of a full-time integrated team that will work together

to meet the needs of every student.... ECEs will help teachers deliver a quality, age-appropriate program—and that would improve the program." That's James Ryan, president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association.

So we see there is the support throughout the system. We acknowledge that it has taken a few years to get to this, but it's an important step. It's a step that will be continued, and we'll be delivering, for our young people and for those parents that need that assistance, the right program. The parents will be able to participate in a full day, they'll be able to deliver their children early and they will be able to pick them up later. They will have to, of course, pay for that system, but also they will be receiving help where needed.

So 35,000 four- and five-year-olds are going to have this opportunity. Full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds will better prepare them for grade 1. It will give them a better chance to finish high school, go on to post-secondary education and get a good job. This is going to be so important, that we don't have to work with the children in grades 1, 2 and 3 to get them up to the right level—they're going to get an equal chance. Those children who aren't getting the attention at home and don't have that support will have an equal chance with the other children, and we will not be spending the money in later grades trying to do that.

Since 2003, the graduation rate in our high schools has risen from 68% to 74%—I'm not sure; those are the figures that I recall, but 6% or 7%. So that's important. We have to get those graduation rates up. We have to get more of our high school kids into colleges, into the technical training, into universities so that they have jobs in this very competitive economy, which just seems to be getting tougher and tougher for the young people. The ones that get left out are the ones that do not graduate from high school. So it's a process that starts very early that we're going to support and that we're going to make sure we move forward with.

From my experience as a consulting engineer—I was out last night with engineers from the University of Toronto, trying to give them advice on how to impact more in our society, how to get more involved in the political areas. You meet some wonderful people who are working very hard, who are into great research projects, their professors are excited etc. We have to give more of our kids that opportunity. Just because a young person is not in a family where they have the resources—this will certainly help them.

One of the things that we talked about with engineers last night was that they have to be able to communicate their ideas more. In my day, the engineer graduated and he became—people like myself, we spent decades in engineering, but being able to get our ideas out. Climate change is something now that I think we have to go to the young people with. Climate change is such a peril to our planet, yet the adults don't have time for it, the politicians will not make the right decisions. So I've got something coming up with 16 high schools in Ottawa that

will get the kids involved at the high school level, get them involved in how to interpret reports they get from government. We still have all these deniers of climate change out there. Why would people be denying climate change today when our Arctic Ocean, a million square kilometres of ice—the summer ice will disappear in 10 or 20 years. So I'm going out to the students in my high schools with some speakers, with my own message, trying to get them more involved.

0950

What we have to do is make sure that that whole education system is better; the kids who are graduating are going to have all these challenges that we never faced. When I graduated back in the 1960s, it was, "Which job did you want?" They're not facing that any more. So the kids who don't get the right start in junior kindergarten and five-year-old kindergarten are the ones who are not going to be able to get into grades 1 and 2, and all the way up through the system they will have difficulties.

This is the first step. It's a good step; it's the right step. A member over here said that it was a brave thing to be doing today in this economic situation, but it's necessary. We do not have the choice to let these kids struggle through the early grades. We have to get them prepared. The way we're going to get them prepared is to give them an equal chance with the kids who are coming from homes where those supports are. There are a lot of homes where the supports aren't there.

I had three boys. We put them into French immersion, but it was difficult running a business, working 60 hours a week and giving them the time they needed, but you knew that when they got that time, they prospered as students. They learned better.

We're just trying to level the playing field here. It will take a few years to get all our young people into these supports, but it's the right direction to go. It's the way that Dryden wanted to move things three or four years ago with the federal government. Hopefully, we'll have the federal government on board, that they will start to really help our children, really help these programs. To try to fund it ourselves is difficult in these days. There are so many demands on the dollars from any provincial government, but we must do that. We must have the federal government on board. The federal government, of course, gets involved in picking up the pieces when we don't get our kids started in the right direction.

I'm pleased to support this bill. I know that there are problems that were indicated, that this is going to happen and that is going to happen. Sure there are challenges. There are going to be big challenges getting this going right in our schools, but those challenges are worth facing. I know our teachers want to face those challenges. Our teachers realize these are important. We will see, as we move down the road, that those problems are met, those problems are dealt with and that the program grows.

The importance to our economy—when they say that a dollar invested here comes back seven times, I believe that. I believe that any of the investments that go into

young people come back to us. Whether we have that dollar to make that investment now or not, I do not think that is the question. We must go in that direction. We must provide for our young people an equal chance.

I'm very pleased to have been able to speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I thank the member from Ottawa-Orléans for reading the notes he was provided so well. Some of the quotes were on topic and some weren't.

Nonetheless, I think there are people who support this. You can count us in as supporting early childhood learning. We did the primary work on this file with the Mustard-McCain report and the resource centres that we set up. I think those were good options that we provided for different parts of Ontario.

If the member is listening—the parliamentary assistant is here—I'm going to present three options that it would be helpful for the government to look at, starting with the premise that we have to provide resources—and how we provide them is really the question. I'm suggesting we could look at the early learning centres that exist today as well as the existing child care operators—regulated child care spaces. They already have the capital and the trained staff who are licensed and regulated as ECE people. Give them some more resources. It probably won't cost as much as \$1.5 billion.

The second option is to work closely with families. Some families choose to spend that time with their children in a learning environment. You could provide supports for them in different ways, whether it be more leave time from their place of work or parent and toddler programming, resource centres, and strengthening those locations—or they could have chosen the current model that you're proposing, the larger school-based unionized program.

My sense there is that really, the issue doesn't satisfy. It's not going to address weekends, PD days or summer vacations. There are a lot of loopholes where families are going to be left stranded. You are going to decimate the daycare spaces that exist today.

It's a poorly thought out plan—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions or comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I thank the member from Ottawa-Orléans for standing up, although there was a little ramble in the middle of his dissertation about climate change that I found difficult to follow. I don't quite know what climate change has to do with full-day learning.

Nevertheless, as I said earlier, we in the New Democratic Party are absolutely in favour of full-day learning. We would just like to see full-day learning extended to all children, not just some children. Certainly the woman who has to spend \$15,000 a year for child care for each child to be able to go back to work is still going to be hampered. Imagine two children: It's \$30,000 net just to pay for child care.

This is a women's issue as well as a child issue, and it still exists in our province despite this forward move—and it is a forward move by the government. It still exists. Women will still be unequal under the law in the province of Ontario until there is a child care program like we see in Manitoba, \$17 a day, or Quebec, \$7 a day. Had we those programs, then truly we could say that women are able to go back to work on the same plane as men.

The argument that men can stay home is really fallacious. Let's face it: Women are, by and large, the ones who stay home to raise the children, and they need the supports necessary, but so do the children. The children need early learning and enrichment at an early age, not necessarily starting at four, but starting much, much earlier.

However, having said that, as I said originally, the historic moment has come to pass. I think the McGuinty government has done something good. We are supporting them and we will hold their feet to the fire to make sure that it's implemented well, evenly and fairly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: First of all, I would agree with my colleague from Durham region that the notes were well read. I listened very carefully. We talked about the need for early childhood education, and I think all in our party and all parties in the House think that's a positive move in our education system. But one of the things that we have to look at is to prioritize what's in our education system and provide the resources that are available in the places where they will provide the greatest benefit to the children in the system.

There are many areas, such as special needs education, where the government says they don't have sufficient money to provide the attention that these children need. It seems strange to me that we would then just accept that and come up with a new program.

Having said that, I also think it's very important to recognize the positiveness of this. Giving all of these children a better start in education and a better start in life will pay dividends in the end; that's where we need to go. We heard that from the member in his presentation. But what I think is important is, because of the phasing in of this, there is a very small group of children in today's society who will benefit from this, but most children who are going to start in our education system in the next five years will not be able to avail themselves of this service. So we're saying that it's okay to have this program—we know it benefits young children; we know it will give those children a better start in life—but we're not going to provide it to all of them. If this is a positive move and it's going to pay benefits, as the member said in his presentation, then we have to find a way to make it available much quicker and more evenly and fairly to all the students in the province, rather than to just a few.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Why is this being done? This is a good question. Let's look at some numbers: China, 1.3

billion people; Ontario, 13 million. They outnumber us 100 to 1. India, 1.1 billion people; Ontario, 13 million. They outnumber us 85 to 1. Brazil outnumbers us 15 to 1.

All of these places are no longer backwaters or underdeveloped. They want what we have. They want the prosperity that we enjoy here in Ontario. With 13 million people, the only way that we are going to continue to be the leading-edge place that we have always been is to ensure that every Ontarian is at his or her best. We do that by starting our training young, at age four or five, in senior and junior kindergarten and with all-day learning. This is the type of program that is going to pay dividends in lower dropout rates after high school and a higher proportion of Ontarians who go on to post-secondary training.

When people come to Ontario, the raw materials they are looking for are not those that are in the ground, in the forests or on our farms. The raw material that really is going to drive value in the 21st century is the raw material people find in the brains of Ontarians, the stuff that they come to look for in our universities, and the way that we are going to continue to have the prosperity that we've always enjoyed, the high-value jobs that our province seeks, is to go out to kids at the age when they're ready to start school and ready to learn and to bring them in for all-day learning. That's what this program does.

To very briefly paraphrase what James Ryan, president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, said, "We applaud the government for its leadership in improving education opportunities and services to children and their families."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Ottawa-Orléans has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I thank the members for Durham, Beaches—East York, Oxford and Mississauga—Streetsville for the comments.

To the member from Durham, I'd just like to say that we have to start. Sure, right now, almost 100% of the kids don't have that opportunity, but next year, starting next September, some of our kids will, and in five years, all of our kids will have the opportunity.

This is a major program that's being rolled out. We don't have all the physical space we need, we don't have all the early childhood educators we need, but this will come. There is a plan to roll this out in a positive way. It's better to have some of our children already benefiting from this now than none at all, so at least we are on our way. It's a four- or five- year program, but we will do it in a measured and proper manner so that it is a good program. We'll work out all the difficulties when we get there.

Again, I would like to thank the member for Beaches—East York for the support of this endeavour. I think generally, in this House and throughout our province, there is that acceptance that this is the right thing to do. It's a difficult time to do it, but we have to move ahead.

I did talk about climate change in my speech, but I was just talking about getting out into our high schools

and talking to the kids and giving them some of the tools where they are going for this big challenge we have in the future. It all deals with education. We're going to have a better start for children, a better situation for mothers particularly, where they will have someone sharing their duties. So this is the right bill and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to support this bill. As my colleague from Parkdale–High Park had to say, New Democrats will be supporting this bill because we believe it's the right thing to do at this time. In fact, we believe it was the right thing to have done a long time ago. I know, although I was not here at that time, that it was part of the NDP platform in the 1999 election. We do agree that Dr. Pascal has done a good job in outlining what needs to be done.

Sometimes it has been said that New Democrats are often Liberals in a hurry. I'm in a hurry in this one, too. I'm not sure that the six-year rollout is something that we ought to be doing. I just want to speak about that for a moment because as the member for Beaches–East York, I waited with anticipation to see what was going to happen when this was going to be announced. There were leaks to the press a few days in advance. I knew it was coming down the pipe. I was waiting to see what the government was going to announce and I wanted to see how it was going to affect my community.

As you all know, I represent an area in Toronto in the Beach and East York, what is now part of the megacity of Toronto. It is a highly urbanized place. Part of Beaches–East York—the Crescent Town area, the Teesdale area, Dawes Road—is considered a high-needs community. It was identified by the United Way and by Frances Lankin and people within the United Way as one of those places in Toronto—one of the 13—with the highest need for young people, children, new immigrants and the like. So I waited with some anticipation to see how this was going to unravel, how it was going to unfurl, what was going to happen in terms of all-day education for the people of my riding.

I have to say I was very disappointed when the results came out because, of the 120,000 people I represent, with all of those schools—Catholic schools, public schools and French schools, everything that is in the riding—there isn't a single school that has been identified in all of Beaches–East York, not one.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm going to get to the board in a minute. Not a single school was identified in all of Beaches–East York.

So when I looked at this, I was somewhat perplexed. Given that there is such a high-needs community at the centre of Beaches–East York, I picked up the phone. I phoned my local school trustee. Actually, I phoned two school trustees—the local public one, for whom I vote because I am a public school supporter, and then I phoned the Catholic school board trustee as well. I asked both of them why there was no identified school in all of

Beaches–East York. They both told me the exact same thing. They said that the government had set criteria that the boards had to follow in the determination of who got the school spaces in the first round. Because of the way the criteria had been set, there was no potential school in all of Beaches–East York save and except one school, which is called Presteign.

Presteign is the school in my local neighbourhood. I'm fully aware of this school, but I also know that my local neighbourhood is not a high-needs area. The homes in there sell for \$700,000, \$800,000 or \$900,000. That's what they sell for. The people who are my neighbours are mostly professional people—they're doctors, they're lawyers, they're teachers—who earn a lot of money. The only school that was identified by the Toronto school board on both the Catholic and the public side was that school. So it was not surprising in the end that that school was rejected. None of the schools that were identified and which met the criteria as set down by the government in the high-needs areas qualified—none of them. I have to question what the criteria were in the first place.

I'm asking the government to take a good, hard look at this because there are people who desperately need this service. There are people who desperately want their children to have the highest opportunity, particularly where the fall-down comes. The fall-down comes in those areas where there are new immigrants, where there are a lot of single parents, where the kids don't have the same kinds of opportunities they may have in more affluent neighbourhoods and communities.

1010

I want to go on by saying that I was concerned, so I went to what was the most amazing all-day learning for preschoolers I have ever seen. It was, if not a Montessori school, at least a Montessori-inspired school on Coatsworth Crescent, in the riding of Beaches–East York. I spoke to the people who operate that school. I spoke to the people who do the all-day learning with young children. I talked about the number of subsidized spaces, of which there are pitifully few, but also about what they were able to accomplish.

It was amazing to me, a man who has no children, to watch these two- and three- and four-year-olds, what they were doing and what they were learning. I was especially entranced that the three-year-olds were writing stories; they had props and things they were given, and they had to write stories and take the stories back. Now, they weren't complex stories, but they were writing in sentences—three years old—and handing them back to the teachers. It was amazing. I was there for an hour and a half. I never heard one child cry. Nobody cried. Everybody was getting along. The teachers were doing a remarkable job.

They spoke to me, though, because they had fear. They had fear of what was going to happen to that particular institution on Coatsworth Crescent when all-day learning came in. They all support all-day learning—they all support it—but they know that it's going to be difficult to maintain the classrooms and what they're trying

to do for the parents who live in Beaches–East York, because of the funding.

It costs much more to look after one- and two-year-olds. They showed me the ratio—it was very high—in the rooms with one- and two-year-olds with the early childhood educators. They showed me that the ratio was much higher than when they turned to be four and five, and the costs that were going to be borne. I asked about the cost, and it's about \$1,700 or \$1,800 or more a month for a child. I'm sure that child is getting the absolute best start that is possible in this entire city, in this entire country, and what I witnessed was truly remarkable to me. But they're worried about the subsidies. They're worried about the all-day education and how it's going to change the mix. They're worried about keeping some of the people who work in their schools, because many of them will be hired by the school boards at more money. We all know that's going to happen, too. We all know that those people who do this great job are going to be hired off to make more money, because the school board will have that money to spend.

They asked me to convey that message, and they asked me, when it was my opportunity to speak, to speak about ensuring that those kinds of opportunities that parents rely on are kept. They will be kept, of course, in Beaches–East York, because the parents have nowhere else to send their children next year. Maybe in the years that follow they may, but for the conceivable future that is the only option that will be available to many of them.

I've spoken often in this Legislature about my coming from Regent Park. I remember, even to this day, the number of children who came from poor homes, who came to school and the difficulty they had to learn, because they did not have the same opportunities and the same experiences or the same expectations in their homes that people from more affluent families often had. There were not books available. In my day, most of them didn't have televisions either, which was perhaps a good thing, but there was not that method of communication that was readily available. Many of them went to school hungry, so that was a problem as well.

It seems that what the government is attempting to do is a good thing, and that is to give those children an opportunity, at an early age, to try to catch up so that when they are three or four or five years old, going to all-day kindergarten, they'll be able to learn at the same rate that one would who came from a more affluent family or whose family could afford the kind of quality daycare that I saw on Coatsworth Crescent. That is what is important, and that is what needs to be done, but it needs to be done more quickly.

With the greatest of respect, I'm waiting for the budget. I know the budget will be coming sometime towards the end of March. The budget, I'm sure, when it unfurls, will say how much money the government is planning to spend in this particular area. It may take a couple of days to comb through it—because when the minister stands up, he'll talk about education and how much money is being put into education. It'll take a few days to figure out how much of that is going into senior kindergarten

and how much is going to be spent on wages and the like in order to facilitate the first phase. But we need to make sure that that phase does not take six years. We need to make sure that subsequent budgets plan in advance so that no child is left out, and especially that no child is left out in the high-needs communities, like those in Crescent Town, that are not going to be given an opportunity in this round.

I can see, Mr. Speaker, that it's about time, so I will stop now if you will allow me to continue the debate on the next occasion.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 10:15 of the clock, this House stands in recess until 10:30, at which time we will have question period.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It gives me great pleasure to welcome the family of my page Jullian Yapeter, sitting in the west members' gallery: his parents, Janny and Yimmy Yapeter, his grandmother Liu Lie Kian Sumarno, and his brother Jonathan.

Hon. Carol Mitchell: It's certainly my pleasure to introduce the mother of page Colin Jansen, Val Millson. Welcome, Val.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Don Valley East and page Ava D'Souza, we'd like to welcome her mother, Angela D'Souza, her father, Ludovic D'Souza, and her brother Jordan D'Souza, in the members' gallery.

I'd also take this opportunity to introduce a guest who will be joining us in the Speaker's gallery, Bette Jean Crews, the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

There being no further introductions, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Acting Premier. The PC caucus has been asking the hard questions on accountability that the Premier refuses to ask about the LHINs, or regional health bureaucracies, that he created; so has the Ombudsman. Is that why your government wants him fired?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think it's very important to note that there is a little bit of history here. In fact, one of the members of this House suggested that regardless of who the commissioners are, no matter how wonderful they are, they ought to go through an appropriate process of reappointment, or give others an opportunity to apply as well. That is exactly what we've selected to do.

I know that in particular the member from Welland is pleased to see that we've listened, that there is a process and that we welcome the opportunity for everyone who feels they can serve the government of Ontario and the people of Ontario. They are welcome in this place.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The Premier has created a new layer of health bureaucracy to deflect blame when something goes wrong and create a haven for Liberal friends and donors. But the LHINs have not improved health care. The CEO of Toronto Central is walking away from his LHIN. Our PC caucus revealed that LHINs are handing out sweetheart deals to disgraced eHealth consultants.

The Ombudsman heard so many complaints, he said, "There is a lot of public concern about the accountability and transparency of the LHIN." This move comes just before the Ombudsman reports on the Premier's special pet project. Why is shining a light on the Liberal government's dirty secrets a firing offence, while handing out millions of dollars in untendered contracts gets you promoted?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: This member opposite will know full well, because he was part of a government that also continued to appoint or reappoint commissioners in various positions of the government. In fact, what we know is that there are five-year terms that come up for appointment, and often reappointment. So we suggested that, in listening to some of the opposition members who wanted to see a fair process so that others could also apply. That is exactly what we selected to do. So after a five-year term—and I must say that, whether it's our Ombudsman or our Environmental Commissioner, they have done some tremendous work, not just for the government but for the people of Ontario—I would think that the member opposite would want to see a fair, transparent and open process of appointments and/or reappointments for people who frankly do stellar jobs for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Arnott: We see a clear pattern here. The Premier fires anyone who criticizes him or holds his government accountable. The Ombudsman has been a tough critic. He called the Liberal government a "colossal failure" in its handling of criminal injuries compensation. He called its decision to cut off funds for cancer therapy wrong, unreasonable and verging on cruelty, and he exposed insider wins at OLG that your government ignored.

The Liberal government would have let these scandals go on if the Ombudsman hadn't caught them. His report on LHINs will likely reveal even more about the character of the Premier and his government, but it looks like the Liberals plan to get him before he gets them. Is this the real reason they're trying to silence the Ombudsman?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I just want to point out that, for example, a number of people, including members of the opposition when they were in government, were subjected to some criticism from our privacy commissioner.

Our privacy commissioner was reappointed. That is one example of people who, whether critical or not, play a vital role in assisting the government to do the right thing for the people of Ontario. There's not one person who would suggest that the Ombudsman and, in fact, the Environmental Commissioner didn't do tremendous work for the people of Ontario. To suggest that after a five-year term we ought to have an open and transparent system of appointment or reappointment—I think it's incumbent on the government to listen to the MPP from Welland and suggest, yes, there's a process that people can be proud of and that they can see. We welcome the opportunity for a huge number of people who want to serve the people of Ontario through these terrific roles in government.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Toby Barrett: A new question for the Acting Premier: You're not only dumping the Ombudsman; you're tossing aside the Environmental Commissioner. Like the Ombudsman, he called it like it is and now you're getting even. How low will Dalton McGuinty go to duck accountability?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Back to the same question. I really find it interesting that there are examples across our government that show that people are appointed and reappointed many times. That certainly happened when the members opposite were part of the government. It was in fact the opposition members who suggested that we ought to have a fair and open process. I think it was the MPP from Welland who said they are adamant that "there should be the same process ... and the process is pretty clear. You advertise the position, you see who's interested in the job, you vet them." We're listening to the MPP from Welland. In fairness, let's give the process some time and see what happens.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The real point is that Dalton McGuinty has two standards. If you're a Liberal friend like Hugh MacLeod, Dalton McGuinty will raid hospital budgets of \$325,000, meant for patients, and he'll help you sneak out the back door to avoid your record. But watch out if you're a public servant like the Environmental Commissioner. He revealed that Dalton McGuinty and his former hand-picked climate change adviser have done nothing to advance their mandate. In his annual report, the commissioner slammed this government for a "lack of vision" and not giving the tools needed to get the job done.

My question: Are you hanging him out to dry because he says your plan is no good, or is it because he says your execution is no good?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do find it interesting that this party wants to subject this commissioner to any criticism of his job. In fact, I believe he has done a stellar job for the people of Ontario. I think it's incumbent on all of us to appreciate the long hours and the hard work that he has produced. This is the same individual who, in 2004, had his term expire. We went through a vetting process,

which included ads in the *Globe and Mail*, and after two days of hearings and interviews, he was reappointed. We didn't hear a word from you back then. You were in opposition then; you didn't say a word then. Today is exactly the same process as 2004. So really, let's be clear: Let's ask a decent question in question period that's of interest to the people of Ontario.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Let's be clear: It's obvious Dalton McGuinty didn't learn from his failures in the disgraceful eHealth boondoggle. In eHealth, Liberal friends like Geoff Smith and Khalil Barsoum were allowed to make a quiet getaway out the back door. Dalton McGuinty is also protecting Karli Farrow, John Ronson, Alan Hudson and George Smitherman from further inquiry. Now he's at it again, letting Hugh MacLeod skip town without having to account for a \$320,000 salary. However, the Environmental Commissioner and the Ombudsman join public servants like Kelly McDougald in being thrown under the bus.

Why does Dalton McGuinty get rid of anyone who shows any integrity but take care of Liberal friends who don't?

Hon. Sandra Papatello: I don't know if the member opposite is advocating a sole-sourced contract to the value of the salary of this Environmental Commissioner.

Let me say it again. The Environmental Commissioner has served Ontario well. I think all of us in this House agree. And in 2004, when his other term expired, there was an open, fair and transparent process. There were ads in the newspapers; five interviews over the course of two days. He passed that process and he was reappointed. You, at that time, didn't ask a question.

Today, it is exactly the same process, and we are doing it again. It is a process that you asked for and that we are delivering on. So let's be clear: The Environmental Commissioner has served Ontario well and there is a process in place to have the opportunity to do that again.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Earlier this week, the revenue minister helpfully provided some sage consumer advice to Ontario families: "The price of gasoline will go up 8% on July 1. That's why so many people will be filling up on June 30."

Does the Acting Premier agree with the revenue minister that consumers should fill up before they pay up, and will he finally tell them exactly how much extra they'll shell out for gas each and every year because of his government's harmonized sales tax?

Hon. Sandra Papatello: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Thanks for the question, I say to the leader of the third party.

You know, this has been quite open on our side of the House since March. This is not news. Energy and services will be subjected to the HST. Fortunately for the

businesses that provide that service, their cost of business is going down. We know consumers will demand the best price, but it is important for consumers to understand what those changes are. That's why I recommend people go to our website at www.ontario.ca/taxchange to get their questions answered.

We're doing this because a quarter of a million people, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs and we believe we have to do what is required to make sure that there are jobs in the 21st century for our people, for our children and our grandchildren. That is why we're moving forward and doing something that's happening in 140 other countries around the world and in four of our sister provinces; the province of British Columbia will be doing it on the same day. All because we need—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday the Acting Premier claimed he couldn't tell Ontario families how much extra they're going to be paying for gas. "Everyone's different," he said. The Ministry of Finance admits that it actually has this information, but it's a big secret. Why won't the Acting Premier reveal today what she knows and tell Ontarians just how much the new tax on gas is going to cost them each and every year?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Just for the member, I want to repeat this. It's actually quite simple when it comes to the HST. If there's no GST or PST for things like basic groceries or prescription drugs, there's no change in tax. If you're already paying 13%, you're going to keep on paying 13%, but the price of those objects, the price of those goods will go down because we're dropping the cost of business. That's happened everywhere else in the world. When it comes to the question of things where they just have GST but not PST, there's going to be an increase in the tax, but the cost of business is going down.

I find it difficult that our friends over there have decided that consumers will somehow not demand the best price. I don't know about you, but the consumers I know are pretty sharp. You have an opinion over there that somehow consumers will willingly overpay. That is not the reality that I know—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There's only one thing I would agree with in what this minister said, and from our perspective it's a very simple request that we're making. The Ministry of Finance has the information that the people of Ontario want. People have a right to know how much extra they should expect to pay when this tax is implemented on July 1. StatsCan suggests it will be at least \$185 more each and every year. If the Acting Premier actually rejects this figure, why won't he provide Ontario families with his government's own estimates?

Hon. John Wilkinson: It goes back to the question that we are reforming taxes; not just sales tax, but income tax as well. So if a person wants to have a balanced

approach to this and to understand the impact for the typical family or their own family, what you need to do, in my estimation, is that one would visit the website, where the whole story is there, where we're very clear about which things are going to attract new tax and, particularly, what are the tax cuts that people will enjoy, the tax relief, both permanent and temporary.

You know, for people it amounts to over \$10 billion over the next three years. You would think the average consumer is going to want to know, "Well, what's my share of the \$10 billion over next three years?" That's why we tell people to go to that website, because you can go there and find the information, what it means to you and to your family, and, if you own a business, what it means for your business.

So I can tell you that on this side of the House we are committed to making sure we have more jobs in this province. More jobs means that we can afford the vital public services—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PENSION REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Acting Premier. People across Ontario are increasingly concerned about their retirement. Some who worked at places like Nortel, AbitibiBowater and CanWest Global paid into a company pension plan all of their lives, only to learn that it might not be there for them when they retire. Others just don't have enough to retire on, and after putting faith in solutions like RRSPs, they're less secure than ever before.

Sixteen months have passed since Harry Arthurs tabled his recommendations for comprehensive pension reform in this province. My question is simple: Why hasn't the McGuinty government implemented any of his key recommendations?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Well, in fact, there's a piece of legislation before the House today that introduces the first 44 responses. The 45th response was the actuarial study that's going on right now with respect to the PBGF. And as I have indicated, we will be introducing a second piece of legislation likely this spring, later in the spring, which will respond to the balance of Mr. Arthurs' recommendations.

In addition, Premier McGuinty called for and has now seen come to pass a national summit on pensions among the provinces at the next Council of the Federation, which is an important step forward. This government participated. We actually had an entire actuarial study done with recommendations from a labour-oriented economist about this in preparation for my next meeting with the Canadian Ministers of Finance this May.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, 65% of Ontarians have no workplace pension plan. Across Canada, provincial governments are grappling with that fact; every-

body's aware of it. But here in Ontario, with this government, the silence has been deafening.

Finance ministers will be meeting in late spring, I agree with this minister, to try to find a solution to the pension crisis in this country. So my question is, when he goes to the conference in the spring, will this minister go there and support the proposal that is being put forward by the Canadian Labour Congress for expansion of the Canada pension plan?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There are a variety of proposals put forward by a variety of groups. One of the things I think all of us have to be careful of is that in the steps we take to respond to the challenges around pensions, we don't disincite employers to provide pensions. That's why a variety of people, including the economist we hired, who has a long association with the labour movement, have said that we have to proceed carefully.

There are a number of—

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No, actually; he worked for the federal government on this one.

I would say to the member opposite that I think the NDP here in Ontario put forward some very interesting proposals that merit very serious consideration in this debate, and I applaud them for that. I think as Canada moves forward, the provinces will come together, along with the federal government, to begin to address this. I applaud the effort of the third party in providing recommendations, and they will be looked at, along with a variety of others—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

1050

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Since the McGuinty government seems unwilling to commit to supporting a national solution to this problem with the pension system in Canada, how about our made-in-Ontario solution? New Democrats, as the minister has indicated, have put forward a proposal already to provide Ontarians with greater economic security in an Ontario retirement plan. Our proposal has been very well received by all quarters in this province, all the way across the province, but the government really hasn't produced any ideas of its own. So, with four million Ontarians waiting, will this government support our Ontario retirement plan?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I want to applaud the member and her party for putting forward a recommendation. In fact, there are some challenges to it. One of the challenges we see now is incenting savings by individuals. We have an RRSP system, which has not worked. Your plan closely resembles that, except it takes the management of pension funds and in fact puts it into sort of a centralized thing. It does merit consideration. I'm not rejecting it, and I welcome further discussion.

Nine hundred billion dollars of unused RRSP room in this country shows that we have to look very carefully at how we incent people to save. The role of government, the role of employers, the role of employees, the role of individual citizens—these are all challenging issues. They

all merit serious consideration. I look forward to representing Ontario at the Ministers of Finance meeting in May, and I know Premier McGuinty will continue to lead at the Council of the Federation.

NATURAL RESOURCE INDUSTRIES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for Minister of Natural Resources. First of all, congratulations on your new appointment. Personally, having worked for decades in the industry directly related to MNR, I can tell you that it is the greatest ministry in government to work for.

Now that we're done with the pleasantries, Minister, I'm sure you've heard from stakeholders in the same fashion that I have regarding this industry in the province that's been decimated, that used to be the economic engine of Ontario and northern Ontario, especially, as stakeholders are saying, when your own members from places like Sault Ste. Marie, that have some resource towns, have been passed over.

Ontario families who work in the struggling resource industry want to know if your appointment by the Premier continues to treat natural resources as a social industry as opposed to an economic, job-creating industry.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I am pleased to be the Minister of Natural Resources, and I appreciate the congratulations. Thank you. I am blessed. This is a great ministry to be a part of.

Really, I think what the member was alluding to was perhaps some of the regulations we have around forestry. I have met with many stakeholders in the last few weeks to talk about the kinds of regulations we're putting forward through the Endangered Species Act. I'm pleased to say that many of the conversations I've had with our stakeholders have been very productive. We have spoken about the initiatives that we are putting forward in the ministry, and I look forward to the supplementary.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Ontario was the economic engine of Canada from Confederation until Dalton McGuinty turned it into a have-not province. The hardest hit are the resource and auto sectors. Perhaps this is because Dalton McGuinty paid \$2.2 million for an economic plan from hip, urban theorist Richard Florida, whose report demeans the work of resource industries. Or maybe Harold Wilson, president of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, is right when he says that the price of hydro is twice that of Manitoba and Quebec and that the Green Energy Act will push them even higher.

If it's not up to you, then who is the champion of the resource families of Ontario, who made our province the leading economy in Canada and who are ready to do it again?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I would like to refer this to the minister of mining and forestry.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We are very encouraged by the discussions we've had with our stakeholders in the forestry sector. In terms of our ministry, what's important to us is that we're taking some actions that are going to

bring the forest sector back to a truly competitive position.

For example, our wood supply competition: We're excited about the opportunities; 11 million cubic metres of wood is up for competition. We want to put Ontario's wood back to work. Indeed, we expect that once the proposals are put in place, we'll be making announcements soon that will bring those jobs back. This is very important to us.

Also, the review of our forest tenure policy in the province of Ontario: We see some real opportunities to make some adjustments to how we allocate licences and price our wood in the province of Ontario.

These are things that we can do, and we are very conscious of the opportunities that are there in northern Ontario, working very hard with the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure to bring about some positive opportunities for the north.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The Greater Toronto Airports Authority is a non-profit organization. It is governed by a board filled with appointees named by the provincial, federal and local municipal governments. It raises revenue from rent and airport fees collected from travellers.

Why did the Ontario Liberal Party accept \$12,784.95 in donations over the past five years from this organization?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I assume that this is actually not a transportation question; this is actually a political question that this member is asking. What I would say is that we, as a party—as the third party does—follow the rules in terms of our fundraising endeavours.

It's extremely important that individuals and organizations in this province have the opportunity to take part in the democratic process. Part of the democratic process is raising money so that we can do the work of democracy in this province—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —we collectively in this Legislature.

I would suggest that if the member has a question that pertains to transportation, I'd be happy to answer it in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I am appalled. I don't think this minister gets it. Passengers pay the GTAA fees, some of the highest in the world, every time they fly out of Pearson airport. Elections Ontario records show a long history of donations by the GTAA to the Ontario Liberal Party; for example, \$1,200 to the St. Paul's by-election campaign, \$2,800 to Liberal riding associations, \$700 to the Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock by-election and an additional \$4,200 in 2008.

Why are unsuspecting travellers subsidizing the Ontario Liberal Party? What right do you have to take their money?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said earlier, we follow the rules as they are laid out. Because I know this member doesn't ask frivolous questions, I will absolutely undertake to look into the question that he has asked. I can tell you that the rules are laid out; the information is public. We have made more information public about the donations that have been given to our party. I will look into the question that he has asked.

But I return to my original point, and that is that in order for the democratic process to work, many individuals, many organizations need to be involved with the governing party and with the opposition parties. If that didn't happen, then our system would grind to a halt. I will undertake to ask questions about this specific issue.

PATIENT SAFETY

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Having a sister who is currently waging her own battle against breast cancer, I was really shocked to hear about the mistaken mastectomies that were performed at Windsor. We are now hearing reports of two women and possibly more who have had unnecessary mastectomies and who were told that they had breast cancer when, in fact, they did not.

From time to time, we all worry about our own health, and clearly the confidence of my constituents in our surgeons has really been shaken. Accuracy is very important to appropriate treatment.

Minister, could you tell us what happened in the events that occurred at Windsor?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First and foremost, I know I speak for everyone in this House when I express my deepest sympathy to the patients who were affected by these errors and, of course, their family members. I want to assure you that I take this very, very seriously.

I can tell you that the hospital has taken the appropriate steps. It has launched a formal review both of the incident and of the doctor in question. The doctor has stopped performing surgeries.

I can also tell you that I have confirmed that the College of Physicians and Surgeons is investigating this issue. They have the important responsibility of investigating concerns and complaints from members of the public about doctors who are licensed to practise here in Ontario. Of course, the college must act, first and foremost, in the best interests of the public.

We take surgical safety very, very seriously. That's why we are requiring all hospitals to use a surgical safety checklist. I look forward to speaking more about—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

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Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm certainly relieved to hear that the hospital has launched a formal review of these incidents. I understand the importance of the role that the College of Physicians and Surgeons plays in investigating concerns regarding doctors in Ontario.

People naturally trust their physicians to act in the patient's best interests and they expect that safeguards will be in place to protect them. My family, the constituents of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and all Ontarians would like to know what action is being taken to restore their confidence in patient safety. Minister, could you tell this House how the surgeons' checklist will improve patient safety in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have partnered with the Ontario Hospital Association and have developed a surgical safety checklist that will be required for all operations in all hospitals across the province as of April 2010. Dr. Michael Baker from the University Health Network is our lead on this initiative. The checklist includes a mandatory review of the pathology and biopsy results by the entire operating room team—that includes surgeons, the anaesthetist and nurses—before the patient is given the anaesthetic.

The results of a 2009 New England Journal of Medicine study demonstrate that a consistent use of a surgical checklist reduces the rates of death and complications that are associated with surgical care.

A province-wide education program with a comprehensive tool kit has now been developed. Yesterday morning, the OHA and ministry officials held a province-wide webcast. We are educating hospitals on how to use this tool—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Attorney General. In a discovery transcript filed in the Caledonia lawsuit, a government witness acknowledges that the tract of land the illegal occupiers claim stretches all the way to downtown Kitchener.

Minister, how have you notified families in Brantford and Kitchener that what is going on in Caledonia can happen to them next?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: My friend opposite outlines the nature of a very important challenge. You have a 200-year-old land claim pre-dating Confederation. The federal government has constitutional, legal and jurisdictional responsibility. So I'm sure my friend opposite will join with me in saying that the only way we can ultimately resolve this very important issue is to have an energized, creative and bold federal government at the table to work with the parties to resolve the issue for the benefit of all throughout the province of Ontario. I look forward to my colleague's support as we get the federal government energized.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Until four years ago, families in Caledonia had no reason to believe that the same things that you and I do every day—you wake up, you feed the kids, you go to work, you have a summer barbeque in the backyard—would just stop. Then barricades went up, fires were set, and a hydro substation was destroyed.

People have been physically attacked, homes invaded and ransacked, and families' insurance cancelled for "acts of terrorism"—acts of terrorism in Ontario, Minister.

The only thing Dalton McGuinty has done is pay lots of money to Liberal friends Jane Stewart, Tom Molloy and David Peterson, with no plans and no results from those studies. Lives of Caledonia families have been interrupted for four years. Brantford and Kitchener could be next.

When will you give the lives of the families of Caledonia back to them, Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm not sure why my friend doesn't want to be part of the solution in a more creative way. This government has been working very hard strengthening the relationship with all aboriginal peoples and First Nations. He is correct that we have been at the table. We've been as creative as we can be. We ask his assistance in getting an energized federal government to the table.

When he suggests that for many, many years people lived together as neighbours, worked together, played together, built communities together, he's absolutely right, which is why earlier in the week I called upon my friend and his colleagues opposite to work with us to build stronger relationships with people rather than finding ways that we cannot do that. Work with us, I say to my friend opposite. It's a brighter—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PRIVATE CAREER COLLEGES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The Niagara-on-the-Lake Culinary School has become another in a long line of colleges which have left students high and dry under your ministry. These students paid as much as \$18,000, and now they have nothing. The school was registered with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and I add that your website says, "When a private career college closes suddenly while students are enrolled in vocational programs, the Ministry of the Training, Colleges and Universities will ensure that either training completions or refunds are provided to the students."

When are these students going to get their money back?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the question because it allows me to bring a little bit more information, because I know the honourable member would want to make sure that all the facts are on the table.

First of all, what happened in Niagara-on-the-Lake was an unfortunate situation, but I think it shows that a new, enhanced, strengthened system is working. As soon as the ministry received complaints from students at this culinary college, we acted. The complaints immediately went to our ministry's investigation unit and, over the course of a week, ministry officials worked with the

Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the federal government and those involved with immigration in order to execute a search. I'm pleased to say that on Friday, February 12, action was taken, a search was executed, the school's registration was suspended and fines were issued.

The honourable member talks about students, and he's right. We do have a system in place to protect students in these—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question was, "When are they going to get their money back?" We know you have a system in place. That's why we say, in the past year, the Ombudsman, who has written two reports on this—it's not an unusual situation, but a very regular situation—said that "students should be entitled to look to the ministry to ensure that their interests as education consumers are protected." He also called on the ministry to implement adequate safeguards, including active monitoring to protect students.

What steps is your ministry taking to prevent disasters like this, instead of stepping in after lives have been ruined?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very, very familiar with the Ombudsman's report, and I would recommend that the member look at some of the follow-up comments from the Ombudsman, when he has actually praised the actions that have been taken by this ministry since we brought in changes through the act. We've also introduced fines for PCCs operating illegally. They can range from \$250 to \$1,000 per day, to a maximum of \$250,000.

But I want to speak about the situation in Niagara, and I want to talk about the training completion assurance fund, which is one of the safeguards in there to help students who find themselves in this situation. TCAF allows students to complete their training or receive a refund if a PCC suddenly closes. I'd like to inform the member that we deal with these situations on a case-by-case, student-by-student basis. We have encouraged students at the culinary institute to come forward to the ministry, and we are working with—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, one of the issues that should be important to all of us is the integration of newcomers into our economy. Many people come to Canada to seek a better life for their families and more opportunity for meaningful and productive work. It is no surprise that a large proportion of Canada's newcomers come to Ontario not only to join our workforce but also to become important parts of our communities. However, just like many Ontarians, many newcomers have found themselves vulnerable as they face the hard realities of this recession.

Minister, there is no doubt we deliver much-needed programs and assistance to newcomers. How can we ensure Ontario's immigrants do not fall behind in these critical times?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would like to thank the member from Ottawa Centre for his question. There's no doubt that the recession has hit newcomers particularly hard. Between October 2008 and October 2009, the net decline in employment in Toronto was 36,300 jobs. Of those affected, most were recent or very recent newcomers.

In these challenging times, it's important that all Ontarians, including newcomers, be able to apply their skills and talents in the workplace. That's why we continue to work at changing long-standing, systemic barriers and provide newcomers with programs like language and bridge training, tailored not only to get them through this hard time but ready for long-term success.

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I'm proud to report that since 2003, the McGuinty government has invested more than \$700 million in programs and services to help newcomers get settled, job-ready and licensed to work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Minister, I know that much of our immigration funding and framework stems from the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement with the federal government, which is due to expire in March of this year. Especially when faced with such challenges as we have seen in this economic climate, it is imperative that all levels of government are at the table to ensure that vulnerable groups like newcomers receive the right support.

I'm surprised to learn that millions of dollars that were promised under the COIA by the federal government have been withheld. Surely this has hurt our ability to support newcomers in the province of Ontario. I know that organizations in my riding of Ottawa Centre rely on this funding, like the Catholic Immigration Centre, the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization and the Chinese-Canadian services agency.

Minister, how do you propose we ensure that newcomers receive the services they need as we look towards the expiration of the COIA?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member from Ottawa Centre is correct that in spite of repeated requests from Ontario, the federal government has not lived up to its funding promises.

Over the first four years of the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, there was an underspending by the federal government of \$193 million, approximately 30% of the federal commitment. That's why it's important that Ontario receives a new and fair deal with Ottawa on immigration funding, a deal which includes federal funding of settlement and language training programs flowing directly to the province.

To this end, Ontario is asking for more control of these funds to better help newcomers. BC, Manitoba and Quebec have done this already. Why shouldn't Ontario have the same ability to help our newcomers? Ontario

has a closer understanding of the needs of our newcomers and is better positioned to identify and address their needs.

We are committed to helping newcomers. We know that when newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. On January 11, I wrote to the minister requesting specific information relating to the home and vehicle modification program. In that letter to the minister, I asked for specific information, such as, first, how many applications were received over the past year from my region; how many were approved; and what the criteria is on which decisions are made to either approve or reject applications.

The minister did reply to me, but I find her response totally unacceptable. She stated in her letter that she was advised by her staff that the information I requested relating to the allocation of funds is not collected—it's not collected.

I'd like to know from the minister how she can justify accepting that answer and expecting me to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you for the question. Home and vehicle modification is a program that is very highly subscribed to. We have been increasing that budget since we came into power. There's never enough money in that budget, but what I can say to the member today is that we will continue to look at the program and we will continue to make sure that we add to this program, because if we want people to continue to work or to continue to live in their homes, we need to make sure that these programs are available.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Under the program, more than \$9 million was transferred out by this ministry over the past year.

In my letter, I also pointed out that applications for the program are vague; that there is no formal medical documentation required with the application; and that there is no formal waiting list maintained to ensure fairness and equity in terms of ascribing this multi-million-dollar program.

I'm saying this to the minister: Will she agree to ask the Auditor General to investigate how this program is being administered to ensure that the \$9 million-plus are being allocated on a fair and equitable basis, and that the people responsible for administering the program are accountable to her and her ministry?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I trust those partners that administer this program. They have an excellent reputation in the community. They have been doing that work for quite some time. They themselves do their fundraising to make sure that the money is there for those who are in need of modification of their home or their vehicle. Like I said, there are more applications, and a lot

of them are for senior people. We know that for them to be able to continue to live at home, they need to have their home modified. We believe in the program, and we believe in the partners that are administering this program for us.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. A renowned palliative care expert found there is a “big, big gap” when it comes to decent end-of-life care in Ottawa. He says it’s putting unnecessary pressure on local Ottawa hospitals, causing cancelled surgeries and long wait times in emergency rooms. The irony is that treating palliative patients outside hospitals saves taxpayer money because it frees up vital hospital resources for patients in need of critical care.

This government had years to move forward with pragmatic cost-saving innovations like these. Can the health minister tell us why this government still refuses to act?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I very much appreciate the question. I think it’s fair to say that we have more to do when it comes to end-of-life care, but we have made substantial investments in exactly the kind of initiatives that she has spoken about. Our aging-at-home strategy has put over \$1 billion into communities to provide exactly the kind of supports that provide that continuum of care. We know that people get excellent care in hospitals and they get excellent care in long-term-care homes. We know that there is excellent home care available, but we know we need to strengthen the continuum of supports available to people, whether they are at the end of their life or dealing with other health challenges that require more support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ottawa families have already been told to brace for cuts—100 hospital beds at the Ottawa Hospital alone—because this government would rather hand out consulting contracts to its friends than invest in health care. We’ve been reminded again today that it’s not just dollars and cents that our health care system needs; it’s common sense and innovation. Building palliative care capacity improves the system and saves money.

When will this government finally take the steps needed to address this important health care issue that affects all Ontario families?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, I completely agree that that is an area of our health care system that we need to continue to strengthen. As part of the 2008 budget, we approved over \$14 million to assist 10 residential hospices that are now open. The 2007 budget announced nearly \$10 million in hospices as part of that budget. That helped implement six residential hospices that had been part of an earlier announcement. We continue to invest in end-of-life care: \$29 million for the end-of-life care strategy. That provides the support to CCACs to help the clients who are at the very end of their life. Again, I say it

is an area where I believe we need to do more, but we have taken some important steps forward in that direction.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. John Gerretsen: From Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: From Willowdale, and a number of constituents in Willowdale have raised this issue with me.

Minister, food safety and confidence in our food system are critical for Ontario’s farm system and the public, the producers and the consumers. A fundamental element of food safety is an effective food traceability system. Despite all the provincial and federal measures to promote food safety, consumer concern about food safety remains. Traceability of food products is essential for consumer confidence in the safety of Ontario’s food chain. Minister, what is Ontario’s strategy for the voluntary adoption of traceability in food products?

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Hon. Carol Mitchell: The McGuinty government is committed to traceability. Our government understands that traceability is a sound business investment for this province’s agribusiness. We believe Ontario’s agri-food sectors fully understand the benefits to be realized through the implementation of a traceability initiative and will do so voluntarily.

Traceability systems provide us with the means to track the movement of food products ultimately from farm to fork. They are a key element in a strong food safety system, and they support the emergency management process. Traceability also brings benefits to the producers of Ontario’s agri-food products by opening new opportunities along the value chain in the marketplace.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, I know that the issue of traceability in food products was raised by you specifically at the recent federal, provincial and territorial ag ministers’ meeting here in Toronto, and I know that you attended the recent Ontario forum on the agri-food traceability issue in Guelph, Ontario.

Minister, can you be specific: How are you supporting a food traceability system in Ontario, and will you commit to strengthening traceability in Ontario? Will it be a long-term commitment for Ontario’s food safety?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Thank you for this very important question. We are investing in new resources. We’re creating new tools and engaging industry to advance the voluntary adaptation of traceability systems in Ontario. The McGuinty government provided \$10 million in start-up funding for OnTrace to lead provincial agriculture and food traceability initiatives. The food safety and traceability initiatives were launched under the Growing Forward framework, and the program offers \$25.5 million over four years to support the implementation of food

safety programs and traceability systems. In 2009, the FTP agreed to mandatory livestock traceability by 2011, supported by national regulation and funding.

Our government will continue to work with the agri-food sector to advance the implementation of traceability systems in Ontario. Traceability strengthens our agri-industry, and I just want to say the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question today is to the Minister of Health. Minister, a group of local health, First Nations, industry, labour and municipal officials in Sarnia-Lambton have joined together in my riding to launch a study into whether industrial pollution is or is not harming the health of the residents of Sarnia-Lambton. Your predecessors in office promised the community health study committee and me that the ministry would consider providing up to \$75,000 in funding to get this study off the ground. The local government has stepped up and so has the local chamber of commerce, but to date, your ministry won't return our calls. Why did your ministry say it would give us an answer by February 16, when it hasn't?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member opposite for his question. What I can tell you is that this is a proposal that we are taking very seriously. We are reviewing the proposal. The health care of people across the province is important to us. We understand that people in the Sarnia area have concerns that are specific to that particular part of the province. So we'll take a very serious look at it, and we'll inform the member opposite as soon as we have made a decision on this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Minister, I appreciate your promise to look into this issue; however, I regret that it has taken your ministry over two years to respond—acknowledging that you weren't in office at the time.

My community is regularly branded as a hotbed of environmental issues which have negatively affected the health of our residents. However, I'm proud to say that rather than stick our heads in the sand, the people of Sarnia-Lambton, through these committees, have decided to act and confront these possible health issues head-on. We cannot do this alone. Public health is a shared responsibility among all levels of government. To date, the county of Lambton has responded to our request for funding and our talks with the federal government seem quite promising, but the provincial government has continued to drag their feet.

Minister, why has it taken two years for the people of Sarnia-Lambton to receive a response from your ministry regarding this important issue?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me reassure the member opposite that we will look at this very carefully. Clearly, in this economy, we do take extra care when we

review proposals like this. We are doing that, and I will get back to you as soon as I possibly can.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. Minister, when the auto sector was in trouble, your government and your Premier, rightfully so, intervened in order to assist those communities that had the auto sector as a big part of the local economies. Why is it that the Premier, yourself and your government are not equally interested in what is happening with the closure of the refinery in Timmins by Xstrata?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much for the question. It gives me an opportunity to remind the member, because he does know this, that indeed we are very involved in the very difficult situation in Timmins with the decision by Xstrata.

I've travelled up there, and we've had many discussions with Mayor Laughren. And, as you know, Premier McGuinty has been directly involved in the discussions as well and has made an offer on behalf of the province to help the community in terms of some solutions to this situation. We remain very, very committed to working with them. There are a number of programs that are in place. I've spoken to the member about them before—certainly the significant investments we've made through the northern Ontario heritage fund and ones we hope to make in the future.

I recognize this is a very difficult situation, one that I understand the member certainly continuing to be very much a strong advocate for, and I share the opportunity. I want to work with him on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, you know very well there haven't been any discussions with your government with Xstrata. The only discussions you've had are with the mayor of the city of Timmins, myself and others who met with you in the city of Timmins and here at Queen's Park. You are trying to focus the discussion on what we do after the refinery is closed. We don't want to get into that debate. That is a refinery that is important to the economy of Ontario, and what we're asking from you, in the north, is that you treat northern Ontario no differently than we treated Windsor, Oshawa and other communities that were in peril about a year and a half ago.

So I ask you again, what is your Premier and what are you prepared to do as the government of Ontario to engage in discussions with Xstrata to make sure that facility does not close down?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We would like nothing more than to have Xstrata change their mind and stay in the community. I have been involved in discussions with Xstrata and have made the case that indeed we would like to see them reconsider this. The fact is that there is a real challenge in terms of the decisions they make, but that does not in any way lessen the ability for us to get

involved with the community. We are working with the community closely. I am working with you, as the local member. We understand indeed how devastating this decision is.

We are bringing in policies that will have a very positive impact not just for Timmins but for northern Ontario in general. Certainly, there are opportunities related to the northern Ontario growth plan. We want to be able to bring forward an economic vision that will have a positive impact. I answered a question earlier about the forest sector recovery in terms of the wood supply competition, forest tenure review. We're working on all those issues. We will continue to do that. I look forward to being in Timmins very soon again to continue those discussions.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Our government has made many environmental commitments to Ontarians. Beyond investments in clean energy and new technologies, the government has been encouraging Ontario businesses to employ methods and technologies that would ensure the long-term sustainability of our environment. Certainly, we are proud of those organizations that take a leading role in maintaining a green Ontario.

In Guelph, our new city hall, Guelph Hydro's new head office and Linamar's new training centre all have many green features included in them, and many other private sector companies around the province already utilize environmentally friendly practices.

With this kind of emphasis on environmental sustainability changing the way business in Ontario views green initiatives, could the minister please explain what the government is doing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: First of all, I would like to thank the member from Guelph for her question.

In 2007, the government launched Go Green, a climate change plan with very solid provincial targets through which the OPS has committed, first, to reducing the OPS's energy consumption by 10% by 2012; and second, to make all electricity purchases by the Ontario Legislature from 100% renewable energy. We have also designated that we will use our design standards for all new government-owned construction and major renovations, where appropriate. We continue to engage employees in building a green organizational culture through the OPS Green Office. This program is helping to position the OPS as a green employer—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I think Ontarians agree that the government is on the right path in terms of its environmental commitments. Beyond taking active measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of our environment,

Ontario is leading the charge as an environmental trail-blazer through initiatives such as energy and waste reduction, print and paper recycling, and green buildings. In fact, at the University of Guelph the students are actually paying an extra fee to help with energy retrofits.

But constituents in my riding would like to know whether the measures that we're taking are actually achieving their targets. We know that setting targets and priorities was important, but keeping the commitments and achieving reductions is what really matters. Could the minister please describe what additional measures are being taken through the OPS to reduce our carbon footprint through Ontario's action plan on climate change?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member again for her question and I want to tell her that we are actually constructing a data centre in her riding, and it will meet all LEED standards as well.

The energy used in the OPS—between 2004 and 2007, we reduced energy consumption by 12%. For 2012, we set an additional 10% target for reduction of electricity consumption. Desktop power management on all OPS computers is saving 19 million kilowatt hours per year. We are banning fluorescent bulbs and using energy-efficient lights that consume 75% less electricity.

We are also working on our travel management, and it's estimated that 7,500 pounds of carbon emissions will be reduced by that initiative—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

There being no deferred votes, the time for question period has expired. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

Mr. Glen R. Murray: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: During question period, the member for Haldimand-Norfolk accused the Premier of "getting even," saying, "How low will Dalton McGuinty go to duck accountability? Are you hanging him out to dry because he says your plan is no good, or is it because your execution is no good?"

Under section 23 of our standing orders, section (i) states the Speaker will call to order a member if he "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member."

Decorum in this House is pretty important. In the municipal world, where many of us come from, you cannot even suggest a motive to another member because it is considered one of the lowest and most base things you can do to your colleague. I would like the Speaker, if you please, sir, to take action and call the member to order.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member for his point of order. I, as always, listened very closely during question period, and I chose to allow the question to stand.

This House stands recessed.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Yesterday our leader, Tim Hudak, met with a number of fruit growers and spoke at the Ontario Fruit and Vegetables Growers' Association conference at Brock University. During his speech he reiterated the PC caucus's commitment to the agricultural and horticultural professionals in this province.

We know this is just one sector of the agriculture industry that needs help urgently. Our hog farmers, our cattle farmers and our fruit and vegetable farmers are losing money, and the current support programs just aren't working.

They aren't asking the government to write a blank cheque. They are asking for an insurance program that's based on the cost of production. Their proposal includes Ontario farmers contributing to the program in good times and bad, through insurance premiums.

Ontario farmers not only produce world-class products; they anchor our rural economy. For that, Ontario farmers deserve to see some respect in return.

All the Liberal clichés in the world don't cover the fact that Dalton McGuinty and his government see farmers as nothing more than window dressing and scapegoats for Liberal broken promises and failed Liberal policies.

Tim Hudak and the PC caucus will not follow Dalton's path in treating farmers as an afterthought. Tim Hudak and the PC caucus will work with Ontario's farmers and sow the seeds for an economic plan to help our farming families have a sustainable future.

Ontario's fruit and vegetable growers know that there is a huge difference between Tim Hudak and Dalton McGuinty. That difference is underlined by Dalton McGuinty's ongoing failure to provide a principled commitment and needed support—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I am happy to report that my local health integration network, the South West LHIN, is creating rapid response teams to address the mental health and addiction issues facing London's elderly population.

The purpose of these teams is to keep elderly citizens dealing with these difficult and complex issues in their communities. This way, they will be able to maintain ties to their families and their friends while living in a stable and secure environment.

The South West LHIN has dedicated over \$3 million of funding for this initiative and over \$7 million in related projects in the next year.

I am very proud of these efforts, since many of our elderly dealing with these problems end up in emergency rooms or long-term-care homes for help. Under these

difficult circumstances, their situation becomes excessively stressful.

Mental health and addiction issues are something that our government takes very seriously. Our Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions has examined these issues in depth, and a report will be coming out later in this year.

I commend the efforts of the LHIN to proactively deal with the issues in an open way, to help our elderly population in our region.

I also want to commend the committee, which was set up by our government to address this issue, to examine it carefully and report to us and to the people of Ontario.

THINK INDIGENOUS EXPO

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to rise today and congratulate the 58 Port Perry High School students who received the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Youth Achievement.

The Think Indigenous expo team was recognized last week for organizing a daylong celebration of Canada's First Nations, Metis and Inuit people. This event, held on April 20, 2009, brought together students from native studies classes, special education, culinary arts and French immersion. These students from grades 10 to 12 showcased the foods, crafts, history and culture of indigenous people across Canada.

The members of staff at Port Perry High School are to be commended for their leadership and sensitivity. Student teacher Dawn White introduced the event. She was assisted very capably by Nancy Hamer-Strahl, Harold Williams, Mike Aldred and Art Beaver.

Thanks to the Baagwating Community Association for providing financial support.

The Think Indigenous expo team created a unique opportunity in learning, understanding and leadership. I wish them continued success in their 2010 expo and thank them for their activities.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise to speak about a little-known fact and, I believe, a non-reported fact about prorogation in this House.

The Premier has prorogued this House, as we know, over a weekend, but what the public doesn't know about that is that every private member's bill, or almost every except for a few hand-picked bills, will be lost. This goes for Liberal backbenchers, it goes for Tories and it goes for NDP private members' bills. Think of all the work done by the citizens of this province, all the e-mails, all the petitioning that has been done by members of all of our ridings—all of that for nothing. Second readings of bills—waste of time. Committee work—gone, lost.

This is an ugly little secret, I think, in this House and is very different from the federal government. Much as we don't support what Harper has done, we have to admit that in the federal government, private members' bills

carry on. They don't here. I think that's absolutely outrageous, and people don't know it. So I'm doing my best to let my constituents who have—for example, in the inclusionary zoning bill: Municipalities, councils that have passed resolutions, councillors and even mayors who supported that bill—all for nothing. I'm going to have to do it all again, as we all are.

Again, just to let you know what's really going on at Queen's Park, private members' bills have been lost because of prorogation.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Bob Delaney: Ontarians increasingly see the difference between then and now in health care.

In the fall of 2003, health care was neglected, underfunded and understaffed. Thousands of nurses had been fired, more than two dozen hospitals had been closed, and it seemed as if the shift to pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care was the unspoken Conservative government policy.

Today, wait times are down dramatically. Wait times are public knowledge and they're posted on the Internet. Some 10,000 nurses are serving patients in Ontario. More than 170 family health teams have brought a coordinated approach to family health care.

Conservatives cut seniors' programs. This government has built or is rebuilding some 35,000 more beds and improving home care so that some 220,000 more Ontarians can age in comfort and in dignity.

In our Mississauga community, Trillium Health Centre has completed a major expansion. Phase two at Credit Valley Hospital is ahead of schedule and within budget. Some 552 long-term-care beds have opened in Mississauga since 2003.

To the Conservatives, efficiency in health care means closed hospitals, fired nurses, longer wait times and a shift toward a US-style, expensive system.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Today I wanted to highlight job creation.

My riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, due to the global economic downturn, was especially hard hit in the area of manufacturing. I witnessed first-hand the strength of people such as Mike Devine, president of CAW Local 1451, who played a leadership role, working with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, to establish the Kitchener Frameworks Action Centre, which is helping people to find jobs.

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This government continues our plan to bring good jobs to the province, a plan that no other party has. Our government's \$32.5-billion investment in infrastructure will create and support 300,000 jobs in the next two years, important information for my constituents. We have invested in wind and solar power to create 16,000 new

green energy jobs, and economists are saying that our tax reform package will create 600,000 jobs.

Proven good news for my constituents and all Ontarians is that employment increased in January by more than 30,000 jobs. And good news for the manufacturing sector: an increase of 8,400 net jobs. Unfortunately, members of the opposition have failed to support these initiatives.

I see first-hand for the constituents of Kitchener—Conestoga that our government's plan is bringing Ontarians the high-paying, high-skilled jobs they need.

NUCLEAR POWER FACILITIES

Mr. Peter Shurman: On behalf of my friend the member from Durham, I'd like to read into the record a memorandum from the Ontario Power Generation chief nuclear officer, Wayne Robbins. It says, in part:

"Supporting the decision of continued operation on the Pickering plant is the extensive safety, environmental and equipment reliability studies conducted on Pickering B over the last four years. These studies concluded the Pickering plant can continue to operate safely and reliably, in an environmentally sound manner, to meet the province's energy needs. As you may recall, an investment was made on the Pickering A restart project a few years ago, which updated the Pickering A station's safety and environmental standards for continued operation as well.

"At the same time, OPG continues to proceed with the regulatory and planning processes for construction and operation of new nuclear units at the Darlington site to further secure generation capacity.

"OPG is committed to continued business investment in Durham region to help meet the electricity production needs of Ontarians. We're also committed to continued leadership in community building through partnerships in our host communities and a continued corporate presence from west to east in Durham region.

"Investing in refurbishment at Darlington and continued operation at Pickering B provides the best value for the people of Ontario. OPG's nuclear fleet provides safe, reliable and lower-cost baseload generation to Ontario's electricity system. We appreciate the support and partnership of the local communities in helping us achieve these goals."

It's signed by Wayne Robbins, chief nuclear officer.

BRAD MARTIN

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I rise today to celebrate the achievement of Brad Martin of Ancaster, who represented Canada in the Winter Olympics last week.

Brad, who is 23 years old, has a passion for snowboarding. I know Brad. He's a great athlete who has done us proud and is now looking forward to the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

By the very nature of athletic competition, the majority of Olympic athletes must leave the games, sadly,

without a medal. Brad is one of those. When he failed to advance from the qualifying round, he said, "I wish I could have done a little bit more for Ancaster and Hamilton."

I understand the sentiment and I honour him for his loyalty to his home community. But I hope Brad will know just how very proud I and all Hamiltonians are of him and of the skill and dedication that took him to Vancouver.

He said, "It's great how proud Canada is of their own athletes, I hope it keeps up. When the crowd was going crazy, I just wanted to go bigger and stomp my run and just make everyone proud." You did, Brad; you did.

I ask this House to join me in saluting Brad Martin and our Olympic athletes, champions all.

OLYMPIC ATHLETES

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: One week ago today, I had the opportunity to stand in this House to recognize Shelley-Ann Brown from Pickering in her quest to become one of Canada's first female athletes ever to win a medal in bobsledding at the Vancouver Winter Olympics. Last night, Shelley-Ann and her partner, Helen Upperton, did indeed win a medal, a silver medal. Ahead of Shelley-Ann and Helen were their teammates Kaillie Humphries and Heather Moyse, who took home the gold.

Last night was a fantastic night for Canada's women's bobsled team. After years of hard work and dedication, they reached the podium in a one-two punch that brought cheering viewers to their feet all over Canada, Pickering included.

Shelley-Ann, who was an outstanding university track athlete, could never have dreamed only a few short years ago, when she went to Calgary to try her hand at bobsledding, that she would be standing on the podium with a Winter Olympic silver medal. Her dream of representing Canada at the Olympics would surely have been in a Summer Games.

It was truly magical to see both of Canada's women's bobsled teams stand together on the podium, arm in arm, sharing their moment with all of Canada.

I know that all of Pickering is extremely proud to have Shelley-Ann represent them at the Olympics, whether she won a medal or not. I know that this House will share my enthusiasm for her and all of our athletes who are representing Canada at the Vancouver Winter Olympics.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to be looking for my petitions—surprisingly, I've received this many petitions on the HST issue daily. I'll just read them.

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day. A few examples" are campgrounds—they were here yesterday; "coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes," and last but not least, "funeral arrangements;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in ... 2003"—most people don't remember that. "However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which costs upwards of ... \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again"—he's on a breakaway.

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Christopher, one of the respectful pages serving the Legislature.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, I wanted you to know that both the member from Eglinton—Lawrence and myself are still receiving petitions supporting Hispanic Heritage Month in April. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

"Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

"Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, films, economics, science and medicine;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario."

Mr. Speaker, the happy news is that this bill was proclaimed. Congratulations.

TAXATION

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day. A few examples include: coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which costs upwards of \$600 to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

It's signed by a significant number of residents of Ontario, and I have affixed my signature as well to the document.

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CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to stand on behalf of my seatmate, the hard-working member for Niagara Falls, and read a petition sent to him by Olga Alexander, who got it signed at the Ottawa Farmers' Market way back on Sunday, July 19, 2009. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and reads as follows:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents as requested in Bill 33 put forward by MPP Kim Craitor;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents..."

There are several other clauses, and it concludes by saying:

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

On behalf of the member for Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to present his petition to the House today, and to ask page Matthew to carry it for me.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: My petition is from the St. Matthew Catholic High School in Orléans.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its 2007 report, concluded that without dramatic reductions in human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, climate change may bring 'abrupt and irreversible effects on oceans, glaciers, land, coastlines and species;' and

"Whereas no one group, country or continent is responsible for climate change, but all human beings are collectively responsible for solving the problem; and

"Whereas the production of greenhouse gases in Canada has increased by 27% over 1990 levels; and

"Whereas our elected leaders have a responsibility to report to the public on their actions with respect to halting climate change for the sake of accountability; and

"Whereas youth in particular have a special interest in this issue, being those that will inherit this earth, our only home.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario swiftly pass Bill 208, An Act to increase awareness of climate change."

This is signed by Emily Aguiar, Hannah Rockwell, Charles Gay and 30 other people. I will submit this and put my name to it in support.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for discussion and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information, such as SIN and loan account numbers.

"(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

"(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit-inquiry records resulting from actual applications

for credit or increase of credit, except in a report given to the consumer.

“(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate.”

Since I agree, I am delighted to sign this petition.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: Another petition from the students at St. Matthew High School in Orléans.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its 2007 report, concluded that without dramatic reductions in human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, climate change may bring ‘abrupt and irreversible effects on oceans, glaciers, land, coastlines and species;’ and

“Whereas no one group, country or continent is responsible for climate change, but all human beings are collectively responsible for solving the problem; and

“Whereas the production of greenhouse gases in Canada has increased by 27% over 1990 levels; and

“Whereas our elected leaders have a responsibility to report to the public on their actions with respect to halting climate change for the sake of accountability; and

“Whereas youth in particular have a special interest in this issue, being those that will inherit this earth, our only home;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario swiftly pass Bill 208, An Act to increase awareness of climate change.”

It’s signed by Emmanuel Mboyo, Justin Ricker, Kerianne Shepley and about 20 others. I will sign my name in support of this petition and send it up with Rachael.

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Shurman: I have a petition from a number of concerned residents that reads as follows:

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

“Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty’s new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day. A few examples include ... newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn’t raise taxes in the 2003 election”—I remember that. “However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which

costs upwards of \$600 to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario’s current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario’s hard-working families and businesses.”

I will sign this petition, because I agree with it, and give it to page Brady.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I’d like to take this opportunity to welcome the students from Davenport Public School in Aylmer, Ontario, from my riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London, who are visiting Queen’s Park today.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK

Mr. Peter Shurman: I move that in the opinion of this House, the term “Israeli Apartheid Week” is condemned as it serves to incite hatred against Israel, a democratic state that respects the rule of law and human rights, and the use of the word “apartheid” in this context diminishes the suffering of those who were victims of a true apartheid regime in South Africa.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Peter Shurman: We debate some interesting things in this chamber, not always what appear to be provincial business. One might think that my resolution falls into that category. But since Israeli Apartheid Week takes place next week on campuses across Ontario, I submit that it very much concerns us in this place and should concern all fair-minded Ontarians.

Resolutions here do one thing only: They send a message, moral suasion pertinent to any given subject. I am passionate about my resolution today and the subject, Israeli Apartheid Week. I am the MPP for Thornhill. Over 40% of my constituents are Jewish. Understandably, there is broad support for Israel in Thornhill, and not just in Thornhill and not just among Jewish people. I have been approached to champion this cause in and outside of Thornhill, and on and off college campuses all over Ontario, and I’m very happy to do so.

I am sick and tired of the demonization of Israel by the use of a word that was only ever applied in one historical case and remains applicable only to that one period of South African history. In honesty, I, along with all colleague MPPs, have been approached as well by those not in agreement with this resolution. I say here and now that I reject their position out of hand.

This is a resolution that is entirely appropriate for discussion in our Ontario Legislature. It's about an annual event in our province on our campuses, and most significantly it's about our values, because our values are the same as the values of the state of Israel: democracy, education, individual freedom, human rights and the right to defend oneself from aggressors.

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In fact, the values of Judaism and of Israel were bedrock values for the foundation of Canada, and those values from Judaism and from Israel date back over 3,000 years—all to say that if you're going to label Israel as apartheid, then you are also calling Canada apartheid and you are attacking Canadian values. The use of the phrase "Israeli Apartheid Week" is about as close to hate speech as one can get without being arrested, and I'm not certain it doesn't actually cross over that line.

It's also a thinly veiled campaign by those whose real agenda is to eradicate Israel entirely. During the last week, I read an online blog or journal—there are, sadly, many like it—and I'll quote from it. Bear in mind that this is not a secret website. It came to me because I am personally mentioned in it, and that simply triggered a Google alert. It's called ziofascism.net. Now quoting:

"Israel is a terrorist, apartheid state that bombs civilian neighbourhoods and hospitals, and engages in ethnic cleansing against its enemies and covert terror against its 'friends.'

"In Canada, the Israel Lobby—a web of organizations presided over by a handful of Jewish billionaires, who head the nominal 'Jewish groups' that together with media that is owned by some of the same billionaires—has shaped Canada's policy to favour Israel's security interests at the expense of Canada's."

Pure garbage—and Israeli Apartheid Week the same.

A few pertinent details about what my resolution is not: I am not attempting to tackle in 10 minutes in the Ontario Legislative Assembly any of the vast, ongoing problems relative to Israel—no discussion today of the peace process; no discussion of the existential questions of an Israeli state. Israel is quite simply there. It isn't going anywhere—not now and not ever.

Let me say that Israel, while demonstrating some very remarkable positives, is, in the end, just like Canada or any other democratic country: not always right, and always dealing with political challenges. My resolution is, however, not about any of that. I raise it by way of asserting that I or anyone else can debate such issues any time, any place, as long as such a debate is respectful and fair to all who seek to express an opinion.

That is precisely what Israeli Apartheid Week does not do, and in our free environment, in our hate-free public forum, it has no place.

Israeli Apartheid Week occurs about this time of year every year in various locations around the world, and it runs sometime within the first two weeks of March. As I have said, here it's in the first week of March, next week.

Here's what is truly remarkable about those who are supportive of Israeli Apartheid Week: Their very use of

that phraseology and the content of the supposedly neutral discussion seminars is really about an apartheid that is quite the reverse of what they contend exists.

Here's why: Those behind Israeli Apartheid Week are attempting to isolate Israel and place Israel on the receiving end of an apartheid experience—the minimization and the diminishment of any Jewish heritage in the region, the denigration of Jewish rights to a homeland, the lessening of Jewish people as not being on an equivalent level with any other members of humankind. How dare they? How dare they?

Do I have a problem with informed discussion about Israel or about West Bank Palestinians or Gazans? No, I do not. Do I have a problem with people of any stripe engaging in political dialogue about that region? No, I do not. Do I have a problem with one-sided views being expressed by either side? That's never a great idea, but actually, the answer there is also no, I do not.

So what is my problem? Well, my problem is the name Israeli Apartheid Week and what's in a name. Calling this series of events by a name that is, in itself, both assumptive and declaratory prior to anyone debating anything, we come dangerously close to an outright condemnation and engaging in hate speech before any dialogue—and there is no such dialogue. Dialogue is multifaceted, and this event is not.

The name is hateful, it is odious, and that's not how things should be in my Ontario, in our Ontario. In fact, my Ontario is not about drawing lines between differing elements of our diverse society and fighting battles 10,000 kilometres away by using labelling and unilateral positioning and sometimes even outright intimidation to make points.

My Ontario is about informed discussion, and if informed discussion should occur anywhere, it should be on the campuses of our universities and colleges. Israeli Apartheid Week is not and never has been about informed discussion. I became acquainted with campus activism as it exists today when I became personally and intimately involved in the York University strike and associated issues about 16 months ago. Factions on that and other campuses find themselves under siege, and that is quite unacceptable.

There are people on our campuses who assume untenable, unilateral positions about faraway places and offer no reasonable room for discussion. As a matter of fact, by way of example, in the last week, a group that went counter to Israeli Apartheid Week applied to York University—the same university that I mentioned—to hold an equal and opposite session, if you will, and was told that it couldn't. It certainly displayed a wide array of speakers, but it couldn't hold its session because the York University administration told it the security of those people couldn't be guaranteed. Isn't that interesting? You can't guarantee the security of people who want to speak in favour of Israel, but you can guarantee the security of people who don't? What does that say about balance on that campus?

In my day, universities were the places where solutions were found through informed dialogue. It seems

we've moved away from that and into a confrontation and intimidation stance. Isn't it precisely that from which people have escaped to take up a new life in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Canada, where all are free and no one need be afraid? Isn't that one of the main reasons that we are all here in this place together?

My generation has not handled some things well. Perhaps the next generation will do better. But with a confrontational approach through events like Israeli Apartheid Week, how can we even begin?

"Apartheid" is an Afrikaans word that only applies to one single event in the history of humankind: the legislated separation and differentiation of races by colour in pre-Mandela South Africa. There is no comparison with any other situation on earth. Systemic racism is fairly uncommon, thank goodness, and it certainly is no hallmark of Israel. To say otherwise is at best a huge distortion and at worst, a damned lie. So I say to those who are behind Israeli Apartheid Week, the name of your event is propagandist and you are liars.

Israeli Apartheid Week, even according to some of its own proponents, makes historically inaccurate comparisons in order to delegitimize Israel and singles it out from every other country in the world. Campaigns like this are aimed solely at denying Israel's right to exist, and they do nothing at all to promote any kind of reconciliation or any kind of real dialogue. A true and lasting peace in the Middle East will only come through direct negotiation and open dialogue. Peace will never be achieved through any kind of inflammatory language promoted by this or any other campaign.

Israel is undeniably a democracy. It grants full rights to all of its citizens, regardless of race or religion. Arab- and Christian- and Muslim- and Druze- and Bedouin-Israelis have full citizenship and, foremost, the right to vote and to sit as members of the Israeli Parliament known as the Knesset.

Finally, Israeli Apartheid Week creates a toxic atmosphere on campuses, that labels supporters of Israel as racists and lessens their feelings of security. That is the truth. I have seen it personally.

It is time in Ontario to say what I am saying, to call for an end to hate speech. Israeli Apartheid Week is not an exercise in your free speech; it is an exercise in the curtailment of mine.

I said earlier that my resolution is not relevant to the existential question of Israel. Israel lives; it always has. The doubters can refer to archaeology. This is a land where Jewish people predate every other existing civilization, every other race on earth, and by thousands of years. Israel operates in a remarkably open and fully democratic way. Where else can anyone make that claim, especially in that region and, in a very real sense, over millennia?

The objectionable "apartheid" reference relates to the supposed isolation of Gazan and West Bank residents and their minimization by Israeli actions and policies. Anyone with an iota of intelligence knows that the day the Katyusha rockets stop landing in Israel and on its

children for good, the day Israel is fully accepted and recognized by its neighbours, that will be the day that productive dialogue and resolution will begin and come quickly.

Finally, I call on this Legislature to do what it has the moral right and obligation to do: Tell the people behind this odious distortion of facts and language that we don't do what they're trying to do in Ontario, that there is no Israeli apartheid, and that there should be no Israeli Apartheid Week suggesting anything to the contrary.

1340

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Before I begin, I want to dedicate these comments to someone that many of us knew and loved: a campaign manager, union activist, social justice activist and my campaign manager, who passed away on February 4, Julius Deutsch.

Julius asked me to officiate at his funeral, a funeral attended by some 500 people. The mayor spoke, among many others. And one of the things that Julius said to me before he passed away was when I asked him if there were any regrets in his life—and he lived three lives, not one. He said, "I never got to go to Israel."

I also want to dedicate these comments to my sister-in-law, who is Muslim and has travelled extensively in the Middle East, and to my church, because many of you know I was a United Church minister before I was elected to this position.

At Emmanuel Howard Park United Church, we did a number of firsts for a Christian church. The first thing we did was that on Holy Thursday—with many churches now, it's a tradition to do a Christianized reproduction, if I can say that, of Seder supper. What we did was a really Jewish Seder supper. We invited a Rabbinic friend to come in and to really walk us through, to have us experience what Jesus experienced on Holy Thursday.

The very Sunday after 9/11, we were the first church outside of Riverside in New York to recognize that what happened in 9/11 was going to be problematic for our Islamic neighbours. We invited Jami Mosque, the oldest mosque in Toronto, to come and worship with us that Sunday, and they came—a whole busload of them came. It was the first time anything like that had ever happened. They sat in our pews, we worshiped together, and we started a fast and friendly dialogue.

What I think we want on this issue, my friends, what we want in the Middle East and what we want in the world is the same, independent of our religious stripe, and that is peace. We want peace. We don't need inflammatory language on either side of this issue. We don't want it. We don't need it. We reject it.

Is "apartheid" an inflammatory term? Absolutely. There are lots of inflammatory terms flying around about the issue in the Middle East—lots of them on all sides of that issue. They are not helpful. They detract from the cause we're all engaged in, and that is peace.

I spoke to a number of people about this very issue before I stood here today and how really to deal with it. I heard from many Muslims—Muslims who have lived in

Israel and lived in other places in the Middle East—and many of them said the same thing to me: “We are not vested in that term. We don’t like that term. We’d like to talk about ending the occupation. We’d like to talk about the wall. We’d like to talk about substantive issues.” And these are both Jews and Muslims, both in and outside Israel. We don’t want to talk in inflammatory terms, and that’s what this motion speaks to.

It was interesting that one of the Muslims, a well-respected one, and I won’t drag his name out, said that, really, just like you heard from the member from Thornhill, Israel is one of the few if not the only real democracy in the Middle East. He said, having been a struggler for rights in Iran, “Certainly I’d rather live as a Muslim in Israel than in Iran at the moment.” And I think he speaks for many Muslims and certainly many of us—certainly as a woman.

As a woman who had the great good fortune of being the one to perform the first legalized same-sex marriage in North America, I know that the rights of LGBT people are important to me. They’re important to me, and they’re important to my constituents. So I look around the world as to where those rights are upheld, and it’s problematic. There are not too many places. We’re very much engaged, some of us, in the situation in Uganda right now. But I wouldn’t want to hold up any other place—I mean it’s a little freer in Israel than it is some of the places that surround Israel in that regard. This is problematic.

But one thing I will say, and I’ll say it to my friend from Thornhill, in terms of symbolism, one of the best things we can do in this House, dealing with a motion like this, is to reiterate what we all share, to reiterate the binds that bind us. I have to say, having been a student of theology, having my doctorate in theology and having read all of the scriptural precedents, that there is nothing in any of our scripture—Muslim, Jew or Christian—that does not call on us all to treat our brothers and sisters, independent of their religious background, independent of where they come from, as just that, brothers and sisters, with love—to extend a handshake and to avoid anything that would cause us to learn to hate each other, to propagate hatred or to propagate anything that would add to the deaths of children, for example. That’s why, when I stand here, I do so with some trepidation.

I’ve also heard the discussion, and I don’t think there’s validity to it, that this sort of motion does not belong here. I think, in a sense, it does. We are a place that is symbolic, in part at least. I know I have motions on the order paper that talk about the rights of Tibetans. We, as provincial representatives, really don’t have a lot to say about the rights of Tibetans, but we should say something about the rights of Tibetans, just as we should say something about the rights of all people who have legitimate grievances in the world. We should say something about it as human beings, never mind as political representatives.

Some have talked about peace—but, yes, peace with justice, absolutely. There’s no true peace without justice for everyone.

Certainly our federal New Democrats have a policy, a pretty widely supported policy, and that is the two-state solution. I don’t differ from that policy as a member of provincial Parliament. I think a two-state solution is the way to go.

But more importantly than talking about the politics in this place, what we really need to do is to talk about how to move from here as brothers and sisters, particularly at this time.

So here’s the thing. Israeli Apartheid Week: Does this help advance any cause? Even some friends that I have—and I have many—on the far left who have experienced real life in their home countries in the Middle East, and again mainly and mostly Muslim friends in the organization I’m thinking of, are very sceptical about such a term as “apartheid” when applying it to Israel.

First of all, as the member from Thornhill has pointed out, it’s not historically accurate any more than it would be to call Canada an apartheid nation because of our history with our First Nations people, although people have, right? It doesn’t help further the conversation. It doesn’t help First Nations people. It doesn’t help Muslims or Palestinians to talk about Israel as an apartheid nation. It doesn’t help Jews. It certainly doesn’t help Christians to use that term, and they support that.

The movement, though, is what I’m concerned about. I almost thought as I stood here that we should really start in prayer, because when you talk about such divisive issues, what I’m used to doing, coming from my background, is you start with prayer even if it’s in a multi-faith context, because you start where you share, and that’s with prayer. Just like in the Seder supper, you always pray for your enemies first. You pray for the Egyptians in the Seder supper. You pray for those that you have a contention with.

What I would suggest to all those on campuses is that instead of engaging in inflammatory language, instead of using terms that divide, we perhaps begin the discussion somewhere else. Perhaps we talk about what we do agree on and how we can move forward so that people’s lives could be saved. That is what we all want. What we all want to reiterate, and to go back to where I started, is peace—peace with justice, but peace. What we all want is safety. What we all want is what the member from Thornhill has in his riding, which, if I remember correctly, is a synagogue next to a mosque next to a Tibetan temple next to a Christian church. We want what we model in Canada. We want this for our neighbours around the world, in part. Not that we’re perfect—far from it—but we want what is so graphically shown in our city.

We want all faiths to work together. We want all peoples to work together. We want to take the level of rhetoric down at least a notch or two and to start seeing each other the way we see ourselves. That is what the Torah calls us to do. That is what the Christian Bible calls us to do. That is what the Quran calls us to do. That is what my Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu neighbours call us to do. That is what we are called to do—dare I say it?—by God. That is what we are called to do.

1350

I thank the member for standing and raising this. I also think, as I thank him, of all those Muslim friends of mine who are also concerned and have legitimate concerns. I suggest that perhaps rather than calling names at each other, they sit down the way we did at my church, around a common table, share a common meal—it's a meal we all share in some senses—and speak. What we suggest as a political party, the New Democratic Party, is that, again, we look towards a lasting peace, a peace with justice.

I have to say in closing that some of my favourite dissenting films come from the state of Israel, films against the draft in Israel, films that question the wall in Israel by Israelis themselves. In Israel there is fervid and ardent debate, as there should be here and everywhere; that's absolutely a given. But at the end of the day, let's drop the rhetoric, not just for now or this week but for all time, and let's go back to our scriptural roots, all of us, and let's speak as humans, the humans, as I say, our God meant us to be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence.

I too, like the previous speaker, am going to vote in support of the member from Thornhill's motion. Israeli Apartheid Week raises many, many troublesome questions. I have been thinking about it since the resolution was introduced. Some of the questions I've asked myself: What's the purpose of Israeli Apartheid Week? Secondly, what is the effect of Israeli Apartheid Week? What is it trying to achieve? I've asked myself in that regard, what is the endgame? What is the ultimate goal for everyone who's concerned about peace in the Middle East, particularly peace among the Israelis and the Palestinians? Does the concept of Israeli Apartheid Week serve that ultimate goal that all well-meaning people have, that is, peace?

With regard to its effect, I say my view is that Israeli Apartheid Week is, in effect, a block on that road to peace. It's a block on that road to peace because words have meaning. Words have effect. Words can be destructive. Apartheid: The word "apartheid," in my view, is a destructive word. It's particularly destructive in the context of trying to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian peace. To compare the situation in Israel, the tensions in Israel between Israelis and Palestinians, to apartheid in South Africa is just wrong; it's false and it's disingenuous. Apartheid week must surely serve another purpose, a not good purpose.

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, the word "apartheid," the suggestion that apartheid exists, is just factually wrong. That's the first problem with the word "apartheid" as it relates to the Middle East; it's factually wrong. In Israel, there's freedom of religion. All races, all ethnicities are free to come and go as they please. Arab Israelis serve in the Knesset. Arab Israelis vote. It's a fully functioning democracy; the Knesset is a fully

functioning democracy, unlike a lot of other countries in the world.

The question then becomes, when I reflect further on it, what can possibly be the motive or the intent of Israeli Apartheid Week? Assuming everyone wants peace—and they say they want peace, the organizers of Israeli Apartheid Week—I ask these questions of myself: Why do the organizers of Israeli Apartheid Week want to inflame the situation? Why do they want to inflame the situation between Jews and Palestinians? Why do they want to further divide Jews and Palestinians? Why do they want to aggravate an already fragile situation? Why not bring the parties together? Why not calm the fears and anxieties? Why not promote dialogue and reconciliation? In my view, Israeli Apartheid Week is destructive of any constructive Israeli-Palestinian relationship. It does nothing to promote the relationship.

Here's an idea, and I offer this to the organizers of Israeli Apartheid Week: Why not have an Israeli-Palestinian peace week? Now, that would be a novel and constructive step. You see, the real victim of Israeli Apartheid Week and that concept is peace itself: peace in Israel, peace in the Middle East. It's peace for Palestinians. It's peace for Arabs. It's peace for Israelis. It's peace for the Christians who live there. It's peace for everybody who lives there.

Why do the organizers, I ask myself, want to exacerbate an already difficult situation? Why not lower the temperature? Why not work towards dialogue, reconciliation and peace? What are they afraid of? What is their motive? Why won't they have an Israeli-Palestinian peace week? That would be truly something constructive.

Apartheid is a destructive concept. To accuse one side of practising apartheid does absolutely nothing to promote peace. That's why I'm supporting the member for Thornhill's motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to participate briefly in this debate this afternoon. As you know, our caucus is afforded 12 minutes to speak to this motion, and there are two other speakers from our caucus who are interested—I understand maybe now one other speaker who is interested in making some remarks on the record with respect to this important private member's motion that has been brought forward this afternoon by my colleague and friend the member for Thornhill. He asked the House to consider "that, in the opinion of this House, the term Israeli Apartheid Week is condemned as it serves to incite hatred against Israel, a democratic state that respects the rule of law and human rights, and the use of the word 'apartheid' in this context diminishes the suffering of those who were victims of a true apartheid regime in South Africa."

From the outset, I want to indicate to the House my intention to support this resolution, to vote for it. I think the member is well-intentioned in his efforts to bring forward this issue this afternoon for consideration. It is timely, as he indicated. Campuses around Ontario, in

some cases, are organizing these kinds of events right now, and I think it's helpful and hopefully informative if the Ontario Legislature makes a statement and sends a strong message that this sort of event is not acceptable nor is it appropriate.

I agree with what has been said in the House this afternoon. I've always believed the state of Israel to be a free and democratic state with individual freedoms, free elections and a commitment to human rights. This kind of event that has been held, I guess, in campuses around Ontario, would appear to be not helpful in terms of advancing towards a solution.

I want to associate myself with some of the remarks that have been made by other members here so far. The member for Parkdale-High Park, I thought, gave an excellent speech, as did the member for—

Interjection: Unionville.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Unionville? David Zimmer.

Interjection: Willowdale.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Willowdale. I appreciated his positive and constructive discussion suggestion, whereby he challenged the students who might be participating in these kinds of events to have an Israel-Palestine peace week instead of this, and that would serve to create a foundation for reasoned dialogue, as opposed to potentially inciting hatred.

The member for Thornhill has been an outstanding addition to our caucus since he was first elected in 2007. He's really given us a new agree of enthusiasm that I hope people will see in this House day to day. He is a strong voice for fairness and for a logical, reasoned decision-making approach in government, and he adds a great deal to our discussions in this House. I want to commend him for bringing this forward today and again encourage all members of this House to express support for it when it comes time to vote.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: Generally, I don't agree with many of the positions of the member from Thornhill, and I'm proud to say I don't, but in this case here, I unequivocally support this resolution, because he has clearly demonstrated a horrific example of what is really hate speech that has been put into a systematic attack on the only democracy in the Middle East. It's called Israeli Apartheid Week. It's just ludicrous.

Here is a small democracy surrounded by all these dictatorships. The organizers of this week never look at what is happening in Yemen or maybe Saudi Arabia or that regime in Iran. They don't bother with those regimes and the incredible amount of torture and systemic abuse of people, their populations, but they pick on Israel. Why do they pick on Israel? It has nothing to do with Muslims, nothing to do with Palestine; it has to do with this long-time systemic hate against anything to do with the Jewish religion. That's what it is.

So these hate-mongers have co-opted people into organizing this; basically, it's a worldwide campaign to

demonize Israel, and this is what this is part of. Israeli Apartheid Week is anti-academic, and it is not a debate but a prejudged diatribe against Israel that prides itself in creating hostility toward Israel. That's what they want to do. It stifles debate, as evidenced by the title alone. Labelling Israel as an apartheid state is a deliberate and calculated attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the state of Israel. That's what it is. Anything to do with Israel, anything to do with the Jewish state, is under attack by these propagators of hate.

It's not just the universities where this hate is organized. It has spread even to our churches. Earlier this summer, the United Church of Canada's 40th general council had a resolution basically calling for the divestment of Israel, entitled "Seeking Peace in the Middle East Using South African Actions for Justice as a Model." So even our churches are engaged in this. Luckily, the resolution did not pass. I'm proud to say that I sent a letter to David Giuliano, the moderator of the United Church, and said that it is appalling that this resolution is even before the church. It was just disgusting that Canada's largest church is discussing this anti-Israel apartheid type of motion.

Then we have Canada's largest union engaged in the same activity. CUPE has been doing this systemically for years: trying to boycott Israeli products and trying to condemn Israel.

We, as citizens of Ontario, should stand up to this type of hate-mongering, whether it's CUPE, the United Church or this group that organizes this Israeli Apartheid Week. It's couched with all kinds of different things about protecting and trying to help people, but it's basically a pointed, focused attack on the only democracy in the Middle East, which is having an incredibly difficult time coping with the enemies that surround it. The enemies are not only Iran and Yemen and all these pseudo states, but this worldwide hatred of anything to do with Israel.

So if we don't condemn this type of utter nonsense here in our universities, in our churches and in our unions, it is basically, with our silence, no different than what happened in Germany. Remember there was a famous quote in pre-war Germany that said something like, "First they came for the Jews, and I said nothing; then they came for the Catholics, and I said nothing; then they came for the Protestants, and I said nothing." At least by standing up and supporting such a resolution, we're able to say that this is wrong, that you don't arbitrarily malign, denigrate and attack one group of people and say that it's to the benefit of some other group. This type of pointed hate is not acceptable. This Israeli Apartheid Week unequivocally is based on systemic hate of Israel and anything Jewish, and there's no way around it. This type of thing is liable to spread, as it has spread beyond our colleges, and we should try to put an end to it as fast as we can. It's not about free speech at all; it's about hate-mongering for no substantiated reason. To equate Israel to apartheid in South Africa is absurd, considering what the state of Israel has

accomplished in democracy and what it has accomplished in terms of treating people from all walks of life. Yes, Israel is not a perfect state, but democracy is not perfect. So I urge you to support this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a real privilege to have been asked by my good friend and colleague the member from Thornhill, Mr. Shurman, to speak and make remarks with respect to his resolution against Israeli Apartheid Week. I think it is striking, as well, to each member here to recognize the many points made by all three parties in support of the intent of this resolution. Each of us has a reflection on why we would like to make remarks. I have two particular reasons that are personal, bringing some reference to why I'm speaking not only in support of the resolution but to, as has been said, the term and the wordsmithing around it—whoever crafted this sort of statement, Israeli Apartheid Week. The two reference points are, first of all, my beloved sister, Jane, who married a wonderful man, Dr. Paul Goodman, who is unfortunately deceased; he died way too young. He was a very kind and generous man, a very intelligent man. I shared many feasts and celebrations with him in his Jewish faith, as well as he in my Christian faith. It's quite interesting that he taught me more about tolerance than anyone I had met, and that includes my sister, who does continue in the pursuit of studying theology, which is part of her life.

More importantly, I had a chance some years ago to participate as a peace observer in Northern Ireland. It was during the time of the Good Friday accord. There is quite an interesting parallel between these struggles, most of them based on differences of faith and most of them based on intolerance—often, intolerance based on ignorance of one another. In that respect, I was drawn to reflecting on the comments made by Mr. Shurman and the resolution itself.

I think it's absolutely true that it creates an artificial atmosphere and diminishes the struggles of peoples, really. The resolution uses the term—and the member from Willowdale pointed this out, the inappropriate use of the word “apartheid” in relation to Israel. It's not only false but also it diminishes, and in fact is offensive to, the millions of people who suffered under the actual apartheid of South Africa.

I know that Nelson Mandela—there was a movie just recently portraying his life and what a wonderful, inspiring person and individual he was, despite the suffering he endured during apartheid, the real apartheid. He in fact appeared here in the Ontario Legislature as a guest of then-Premier David Peterson. This was sometime before 1990. Nelson Mandela made the remark that he could not conceive of Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories “if Arab states do not recognize Israel within secure borders.” That's really the politics of intolerance, and the crucial part of this whole debate.

1410

But if you look at the comparison to apartheid, it's actually false and spurious, and provokes the toxic

atmosphere that my good friend mentioned. It bears no resemblance to the realities of contemporary Israel and plays down the uniqueness of South Africa and the experience of apartheid, as I've mentioned.

The resolution reminds us that “the use of the word ‘apartheid’ in this context diminishes the suffering of those who were victims of a true apartheid regime” and, in fact, the values of Judaism itself.

Prior to 1994, apartheid in the state of South Africa was extraordinarily repressive. Through legalized racism, it regulated every detail of the lives of 90% of the citizens on the basis of the colour of their skin. The concept of apartheid, or separateness, was actually enshrined in South African law in 1948 and only came to an end in 1994.

By contrast, the state of Israel was founded in 1948, on the very principles of democracy. The Israeli declaration of independence says that the nation will uphold the full social and political equality of all citizens, guaranteeing full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture. The declaration affirms that the State of Israel will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all inhabitants. It is based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew prophets themselves. Israel's declaration of independence states that it will safeguard the sanctity of shrines and holy places of all religions and will dedicate itself to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The declaration stands in sharp contrast to the dozens of laws enacted by the South African regime to enforce the racism and segregation of apartheid. Israel's declaration of independence is honoured not only in principle but indeed in practice throughout the world.

As a democratic state, Israel upholds the rule of law for all citizens who fully participate in Israel's political life. Arab students and professors study, research, teach and debate at all Israeli university campuses, including at Haifa, a university where 20% of the student body is Arab. Those who might consider boycotting Israel's universities and other institutions should remember that, in doing so, they would indeed be boycotting both Jews and Arabs.

As a member of the Legislature, we have a duty to protect these very values that are being debated today. If a democratic country that supports the rule of law, human rights and personal freedom is described as an apartheid state, that claim should not go unchallenged.

I can tell you that I also have concerns that this terminology may indeed incite hatred and provoke conflict against the state and the people, as well as our own freedom and perception of it.

I will be voting, I hope with many others—or all others; I hope unanimously—in support and in favour of the resolution from my good friend, partner and colleague the member from Thornhill. I would call on this House to support this resolution unanimously.

With the final remaining seconds, I would only state that in the debate that I've listened to today, there has been no recognition for this hate speech of Israeli

Apartheid Week. That's what this is about: tolerance, to the fullest extent of the democracy that we all share.

In that spirit, I will leave the rest of the time for my colleagues to make remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you to all of the members who participated in the debate, as well to members who approached me on a one-to-one basis and offered their support. It's a nice thing to stand in the Legislature, which is so often filled with acrimony and rancour, and hear members from all three parties talk in positive terms about something that should be a positive experience, which is the opportunity for people who live in Ontario to engage in informed debate, and very particularly on the campuses of Ontario to be able to put forward ideas that, ultimately, are not meant to demonstrate that Israel is any more perfect as a country than Canada or any other but, rather, to look for solutions to the problems that each country has.

Very particularly, thank you to the member from Parkdale–High Park, who I listen to often in debate, who brings her take on the world with a very wide-ranging and open-armed approach to questions that concern religion and background; to the member from Willowdale, for his recognition that this is about an endgame that has nothing to do with apartheid, but existence; to the members and my colleagues from Wellington–Halton Hills and Durham for their added comments, and to my friend from Eglinton–Lawrence who, while he may not agree with me most times, thank goodness agrees with me on this one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I should have explained, since the Conservatives hadn't used all their time, you had the minute 30 plus two minutes.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Well, I have a couple more things, then, if you like.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Okay. That ending the time for this ballot item, we will vote on Mr. Shurman's item in about 100 minutes.

ZERO WASTE DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA JOURNÉE « ZÉRO DÉCHET »

Mr. Kular moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 247, An Act to proclaim Zero Waste Day / *Projet de loi 247, Loi proclamant la Journée zéro déchet*.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: Thank you, Speaker. I would also like to thank my colleagues who have agreed to speak to Bill 247.

I would like to begin this debate of the merits of Bill 247 by acknowledging the excellent work that's already under way in this province by our government, municipal governments, non-governmental organizations and private citizens, to protect our public health, natural resources and our environment by reducing waste in our society, especially through waste diversion and conservation.

Bill 247 would proclaim the Wednesday of the third week of every October as Zero Waste Day. This bill would be an opportunity for every Ontarian to witness the actual amount of waste that's produced over the course of a typical day. It would be an opportunity to challenge Ontarians, for one day, to reduce as much as possible the waste in their lives and, in doing so, conserve resources and reduce their impact on the environment.

The challenge of achieving zero waste in Ontario may seem overwhelming. After all, the Minister of the Environment has expressed his belief that many people consider waste a normal by-product of their daily activities. You might even say that we live in a disposable age, when any products or material we no longer have use for may easily be thrown out and replaced. That's why we must continue to challenge Ontarians, as individuals, families, communities and industries, to transform that wasteful outlook and to see the opportunities to reduce our waste through conservation and waste diversion, sending what we do produce as waste to facilities where it can be reduced, reused or recycled, to have the value of our waste materials reclaimed as products with a renewed use, and in so doing, to help protect Ontario's natural legacy.

Certainly, this work is already under way in this province in a big way. Blue boxes to collect recyclable waste from households and businesses are a common sight. Waste diversion rates in communities and neighbourhoods with blue boxes are as high as 66%. The overall residential recycling rate is estimated to be about 39%.

1420

Manufacturers of plastic bottles, through industry stewards, are helping to fund recycling programs that capture as much of their disposable products as possible before they are abandoned in our landfills.

Twenty-six municipalities in Ontario offer household compost programs that transform organic household wastes into nutrient-rich soils for use in our gardens, parks and farms.

We have also introduced special programs to collect electronic and household hazardous wastes before they are allowed to slowly poison our natural environment and taint our vital water and soil. We have legislation to control factory and vehicle emissions.

We advocate energy conservation, which reduces the demand for fossil fuels through the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design—LEED—rating system to promote efficiency in public buildings. Through the Green Energy Act, we are demanding home energy

audits and investing strategically in the research and development of green energy alternatives that will power this province's communities and businesses through our Green Energy Act. Through the Waste Diversion Act, and in co-operation with stakeholders, businesses and industries, we continue to explore innovative and cost-effective solutions to our waste problems.

Some might say that all of this is enough, but the task of reducing our society's impact on the natural environment remains enormous. The Ministry of the Environment has estimated that about 34,000 tonnes of waste are produced each day in this province. The majority of that waste ends up in our landfills. On a yearly basis, this amounts to about 12.41 million tonnes a year—almost a tonne of garbage for every man, woman and child in this province.

While a growing amount of the most harmful waste is diverted to be reused, recycled and re-treated in order to reduce its damage to the natural environment, most of what remains is still harmful. In fact, roughly 80% of what we waste continues to make its way to landfills despite current efforts, taking years and decades or even centuries to break down and vanish.

Taken one day at a time and one person at a time, the challenge of drastically reducing waste becomes manageable at a very personal level. Zero Waste Day is something that can be taken into each home, school and workplace. At home, Zero Waste Day can be an opportunity for parents and children to pay special attention to the water and energy they use. They can take shorter showers, run less water through the taps, turn off lights and electronics when they are not needed, and even install electricity-saving equipment. They can throw out less garbage and make the choice to recycle more paper products, plastics and metals.

If renovating, they can be reminded to consider donating old carpets, kitchenettes, toilets, sinks and cans of paint to such places as a local Habitat for Humanity ReStore. Families can ensure they put their organic food waste into the household composter or compost bin.

On Zero Waste Day, students can brainstorm ways to conserve more in their own schools, beginning with ways they can produce less waste, such as buying personal supplies that are made from recycled materials. Classes can even use the day to organize a recycling drive to gather waste that can be diverted from the landfill to more useful places, such as recycling depots.

Even adults, in their workplaces, can be encouraged to rethink how they can use office material. They may opt to make fewer photocopies or print jobs in favour of sending more e-mails.

Reusable cups and mugs can be given to students and staff in order to reduce the need for single-use bottles of water. These cups can be refilled at water dispensers or using tap water.

Over this one day, the amount of waste that is reduced in Ontario may not seem much. What will have been achieved, however, is a dramatic illustration to individuals of just how much waste they have saved, and that

may be enough to encourage many of them to get into the habit of preventing more waste on an ongoing basis.

The fact is, this province—as a society as much as a government—can and should do more to promote conservation of our natural resources and our environment.

Zero Waste Day would help to promote this goal. It could also be a day to recognize what is being achieved by corporate leaders.

Plastic bottle manufacturers are doing their utmost to capture single-use bottles before their value as a waste material that can be remade is lost to a landfill.

In my own riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton, the Emterra Tire Recycling facility can process up to 1.4 million used tires from cars and light trucks, shredding the rubber into crumb, which is then used to make doormats, gymnasium mats for schools and playgrounds, sports field turf, asphalt, industrial floor coverings and automotive products.

Clearly, the Zero Waste Day concept is not necessarily a competition between environmental stewardship and today's economic challenges.

Companies such as Walmart have proven that through environmentalism and conservation, there are in fact real economic opportunities for innovators and businesses.

I think it's very important that Zero Waste Day would be an opportunity for students, businesses, community leaders and each of us as legislators to study and research or at least be especially mindful of many creative solutions to waste management that are under way throughout the world.

I'm requesting members of all sides of this House to support this bill to enact and proclaim Zero Waste Day on Wednesday of the third week of October each year.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Here we are debating yet again another day to create further awareness of the importance of waste diversion. Certainly it's a subject we all agree is a very important goal.

Specifically, we're being asked to designate the third Wednesday of October during what many would recognize as Waste Reduction Week and to designate a day as Zero Waste Day.

It was about three months ago when we were in the Legislature debating the merits of Climate Change Awareness Day. In fact, during that debate, I came to realize that in this session alone, we have debated Peace Officers Memorial Day, Tom Longboat Day, Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Day, Greenbelt Day, National Students against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day.

Interjection.

1430

Mr. Toby Barrett: That will be a long day; it's a long title—Stop Human Trafficking Day, St. John Ambulance Day, Mental Health Awareness Day and Climate Change Awareness Day, as I had mentioned. I'm not downplaying the importance of these days, these awareness initiatives, but there are just so many days in the year.

I do find in my area that much of the concern is with the economy, actually, and to some extent the deficit and where we're heading down that road as far as our children and grandchildren go. We're concerned that with yet another day, a Zero Waste Day—I don't see it as a diversion or anything; I don't mean to suggest that, but—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It is wasteful, though.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I don't know about that. Are you speaking next?

It will engender some positive headlines, I'm sure, and maybe make the 6 o'clock news. I am the environment critic, but I also get concerned with the economy and what we can do as far as job creation in this great province of Ontario.

So I know when one's ballot comes up, oftentimes members do come up with a designation for another day, and it's probably a good thing in one sense, a type of green awareness day. I'm not sure if there are any days left when we're not recognizing something. Again, there would be proponents for this bill, Bill 247, and their hearts would be in the right place. Quite frankly, I wonder, though, in designating yet another day in addition to the myriad of designated days, and more specifically the environmental type days, where does this end?

As far as the environmental calendar, we all know about Earth Day. That goes back to 1970. In 1970, I was teaching environmental science and I celebrated Earth Day. I was in New York City. I had a very large Earth Day decal on the front windshield of my truck. People recognized that decal—certainly in Manhattan they did.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Was it a big truck?

Mr. Toby Barrett: It was a gas-guzzler, a 289 Ford engine, four-wheel drive, but this was 1970.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That was then.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes. After that, I drove something different.

But while we're on that subject, I would just like to take a look at Earth Day and the success of Earth Day.

Going back 39 years, I was teaching agriculture and environmental science. At that time, my students were up to the challenge in a very real and direct way. Each day, one of my students would go up to the cafeteria at about 3 in the afternoon, and the people who ran the cafeteria—it was quite a large high school—would have assembled all of the kitchen waste leftovers, the food leftovers and other related food waste. We would bring it down to my area—I had a greenhouse and there was a chicken pen—and we would throw it on a compost pile all that winter. Guess what? That spring—I had lots of students, about 200 students—we would shovel all this stuff through a compost shredder and you would get the most beautiful black tilthy soil you can imagine from the kitchen waste. It only took a few months. We would bag it up and put it in bushel baskets. People from the town of Simcoe and the area would come in the springtime, pick up some of the plants from our greenhouse, and go home with a bushel basket of compost that came right from the high

school cafeteria. So we had young people, then, contributing in a very direct way. Here we are, 39 years later, and I don't know how many high schools or universities—I don't know about the cafeteria here, whether they do any direct composting. We could have a compost pile at Queen's Park.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I expressed that to the Speaker.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I think you did, and I went on your tree tour.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That was another one.

Mr. Toby Barrett: And that could be an idea. Who knows where the leaves go from Queen's Park? They do get raked up in the fall.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I know that the squirrels get eaten by the hawks.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Oh, the red-tailed hawk. Yes, I've watched that, and those who have a window looking out over Queen's Park. So within the legislative precinct and the adjacent park to the north, we're blessed with some opportunities to perhaps do some direct action for the benefit of our area environment.

I'm looking back to what I consider those visionary days of the early 1970s, and I do question to what extent we have progressed. Certainly the Ontario government of the day initiated much of the environmental legislation we presently have. I think of the founder of Earth Day, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson. He was very concerned, at that time, with respect to population growth and environmental sustainability—the impact of the human population on our environment. Back in 1963, he persuaded President John F. Kennedy to take a nationwide conservation tour.

At the time, Gaylord Nelson, for purposes of environmental awareness, took a page out of the anti-Vietnam protest book as far as hosting teach-ins. He switched that to environmental teach-ins. His thought was, why not have a nationwide teach-in on the environment? That was the first Earth Day in 1970, and it involved 20 million participants. So we focus on Earth Day: a name, a symbol—a brand, if you will—that has become well-publicized and in many ways hasn't lost much in translation over the past 39 years.

Just going back to Gaylord Nelson's concern with overpopulation in the early 1970s, back then the global population was 3.7 billion, today we're clocking at 6.7 billion people and by the end of my statement, there will be another 375 residents on the planet. In the next 30 years there will be another 30 more Earth Days and there will be another four million people expected to arrive just in the GTA and the Golden Horseshoe alone. Greenbelt or not, in my view that is not sustainable.

As Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller has stated, "This rate of growth is unprecedented in Ontario; the anticipated increase is equivalent to creating a mid-sized city roughly the size of Kitchener every year for the next 24 years." If you get that many people arriving in the future, that's an awful lot of garbage, an awful lot of waste and an awful lot of potential waste management

concerns. Whether the impact of a Zero Waste Day is up to dealing with that—it would certainly contribute as part of an approach to that; I would certainly acknowledge that.

I think we should recognize and celebrate, if you will, the positive results, in my view, from the creation of Earth Day, something that I feel is well worth continuing to support.

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Just a few fast figures here: On April 5, the environment minister of the day, Leona Dombrowsky, announced 60% of the province's waste would be diverted by 2008. I have one quote from her: "Government intends to assist municipalities to divert 60% of their municipal solid waste by the year 2005."

We obviously did not meet that target. A deadline of 60% diversion has well passed, and I regret to inform the House that the minister admits it's just 22% at this point. So there is a target that wasn't met. Perhaps the designation of a day might help this government raise their own awareness on that front.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I was going to be a little critical—not of the member, but of the government—as it relates to their commitment to conservation, the Liberal commitment to waste diversion and their interest in incineration, which former US Vice-President Al Gore spoke against.

But in the spirit of this bill, in the spirit of promoting the principles of zero waste in Ontario, I am not going to divert too much of my attention, including conserving my energy, so that I can deal with the next motion, the library services for the visually impaired.

So I just wanted to tell the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, I'll be supporting your motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir maintenant de soutenir mon collègue le représentant de la circonscription de Bramalea-Gore-Malton et ce projet de loi 247, Loi proclamant la Journée « zéro déchet ».

Qu'est-ce que c'est que la Journée « zéro déchet »? C'est un jour pour faire face au défi. C'est une opportunité pour démontrer aux Ontariens et Ontariennes comment réduire nos déchets dans notre vie quotidienne, à travers notre société, dans le but de protéger notre écosystème.

Le défi pour nous tous est de produire le minimum possible de déchets et d'ordures.

Pour les étudiants, ceci veut dire ne pas prendre un repas à emballage jetable à l'école; pour les adultes, réduire le nombre de photocopies et d'impressions, et d'autres mesures.

One of my colleagues on the opposite side used a little bit of the easy humour approach on the many, many different days that are proclaimed in the province of Ontario. I would simply suggest that it's probably an

indication of how special and vibrant and full our political and social life in Ontario is.

While the Conservatives may wish to conserve the number of days, I would respectfully suggest that that is not really the mandate of this Legislature. I'd also just note that he did seem, in the latter part of his speech, to actually begin the proclamation of a compost day, which I, in advance, will support.

Le concept « zéro déchet » encourage la conservation de toutes les ressources, notamment de ces précieux biens que sont l'eau douce et les ressources naturelles. Il vise aussi à stimuler l'innovation économique et technologique, ce qui peut contribuer à réduire la quantité de déchets que produit notre société grâce à leur transformation en produits utiles.

Speaker, as you will know, as physicians, of course we have a particularly prescribed mandate; but I think those of us who are physicians and enter the Legislature can become, say, physicians to the body politic, possibly environmental physicians. Theologians, for example, have also been described as "spiritual physicians."

So with that, I would commend my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, who is utilizing both his vantage points, not only as a legislator, but also as a physician who is certainly concerned with the environment, with toxins, with environmental pollution, with air quality, with water quality, and of course, a myriad of other issues that impact the human body and the systemic health of our province in bringing forward this important issue, this important day for engaging our public, for bringing these issues to the forefront, whether it's in schools or colleges, in industry, in universities and so on.

With that, I would first of all like to offer congratulations to him for bringing forward this important resolution, as well as to yield the floor to my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Phil McNeely: It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to Bill 247, An Act to proclaim Zero Waste Day.

First, I want to thank the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton for proposing this bill. Reducing waste in the environment is important in creating a culture of conservation in Ontario and fits into Ontario's already existing environmental policy and Ministry of the Environment programs.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, and having worked on the Green Energy Act, I fully realize the importance of supporting new initiatives that will contribute to the province's efforts to increase awareness of environmental issues. For this reason, I will enthusiastically support my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton in his efforts to see Zero Waste Day established in Ontario. In my own work on climate change, I have become convinced that we urgently need to take action, and in many directions. Taking action begins with creating awareness.

Statistics show that roughly 34,000 tonnes of waste is sent daily to Ontario landfills. This works out to about 12.4 million tonnes of waste that cannot be reused or

recycled and that ends up in our landfills each year. Looking at these numbers, it's clear that we need to do more than reuse and recycle; we need to reduce how much waste we produce. Also, it is clear that more needs to be done to encourage individuals and communities to change their habits and to inform them as to how they can reduce waste.

Many zero-waste projects are already under way at the grassroots level, whether they are in schools, in non-governmental and non-profit organizations or other community-based initiatives. I know that many high schools in my constituency—and I have to praise the high school kids. They are way the heck ahead of adults on this, and they're enthusiastic about contributing to and developing new ways to reduce, reuse and recycle. Creating a specific day that will focus the efforts of these groups to reduce waste will be an efficient and an effective way not only to create awareness but also to incite Ontarians to action.

Zero Waste Day also fits in nicely with Canada's Waste Reduction Week in the third week of October. Having zero waste on the Wednesday of that week will go even further in creating environmental awareness.

We urgently need to change the way we think about the waste we produce, whether the waste comes from disposable products or from using energy in a wasteful manner. Reducing waste is the most effective way to create a culture of conservation and to save ourselves money in the long run. By reducing the amount we waste, we will lessen the need to spend money and resources on recycling and reusing products. So much emphasis is placed on recycling and reusing; it is time we focus on cutting out wasteful habits altogether.

So I'm very, very pleased today to be able to support the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, and I hope that the House supports this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd also like to commend our colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton for introducing Bill 247, An Act to proclaim Zero Waste Day. It certainly is a good way to remind Ontarians about the importance of conservation and reducing waste.

I think it really is imperative that we place a very high priority on the three Rs—reduce, reuse and recycle. The ways of generations past are simply unsustainable. We need to move on a path towards a zero-waste future, and we need to look at waste in new ways, seeing the opportunities inherent in materials we once thought of as garbage.

This bill complements some of the initiatives that we've already taken. Certainly many of them did occur several decades ago. I well remember as medical officer of health for York region, when they had their very first household hazardous waste program at the region, getting the engineers involved to understand that it was extremely important to also divert needles that were used by diabetics from landfill, with the possibility of injury and contamination from bacteriological and viral risks. It

was something that we in fact implemented some 20 years ago. But now we have a uniform program across the province, and our new household hazardous waste program, as of July 1, 2010, will include things such as fluorescent lights, pharmaceuticals and household cleaners. It is very important that we do not have these end up in our landfills or even poured down the drain.

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It's also a great step forward that we have an e-waste program, which started April 1, 2009. The first phase involves computers and TVs. It was an impetus for us to finally get rid of our 1985 Zenith that had served us faithfully because we could now be confident that it would be recycled. These types of initiatives keep toxics like lead and mercury out of our landfills, and also we can recover valuable materials.

I'm very optimistic that the opposition parties will support this bill. We know that they like to reuse and recycle old ideas during question period, so no doubt this will appeal to them. I'm hoping they will move on the third R, reduce. I know, as a rule, that less is, in fact, more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's my pleasure to speak on Bill 247, brought forward by MPP Dr. Kular from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I think it's an excellent bill in front of us and certainly I'm going to support it.

I can tell you, in my hometown community of Ajax–Pickering, we had already started some 25 years ago a project called Ajax Environmental Affairs Week. We were extremely successful. We have over 1,000 volunteers and we do tremendous good work in the community.

One night at Ajax council—back in those days, when I was a member of Ajax council, at the end of each council meeting there was a time left for residents to come forward and ask questions. I had spoken on Ajax Environmental Affairs Week that evening and a lady came forward. Her name was Sherry Brown. At that time I didn't realize she was the president of ACE, which is Ajax Citizens for the Environment. She asked the simple question, "What about waste reduction?" That's a quarter of a century ago. I have to tell you, even staff was a little stumped. I said, "By all means, I'd be pleased to speak with you after the meeting," and some year and a half later we were under way with an annual week that's now in its 23rd successive year. It is extremely successful and it does a tremendous amount of good work in the community. It has nowhere to go but grow.

I can tell you that producing zero waste is a challenge for manufacturers as well; let's be fair. That said, the onus is not 100% on the consumer. I'm a businessperson and I have a responsibility to help reduce packaging and to produce less weight at the end of the product's life. Business has a duty to do this throughout each and every one of their manufacturing processes. We should be reminding businesses of this. Let's remind business and the general public every day of the year, but let's

specifically remind them on October 20th annually, which is the date that the good doctor has brought forward to become Zero Waste Day in Ontario. I hope each and every one of us here today stand and support that unanimously. It certainly deserves it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Kular, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: I want to thank my honourable colleagues, the members for Haldimand–Norfolk, Trinity–Spadina, Etobicoke North, Ottawa–Orléans, Oak Ridges–Markham and Ajax–Pickering.

Proclaiming a day, whether it's a Zero Waste Day or not, reminds people to observe that day. I definitely think that if we can proclaim this Zero Waste Day by passing Bill 247 today, it will help remind us to reduce our waste.

As I said, Zero Waste Day, if passed, would fall on the Wednesday of the third week of every October, a week acknowledged by many organizations and communities in this province as Waste Reduction Week. So even if it's one day, it will definitely make some dent, and it will continue to move us forward, at least achieving some reduction in our waste production.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will vote on Mr. Kular's ballot item in about 50 minutes.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

ACCESSIBILITÉ POUR LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I move that, in the opinion of this House, all levels of government have a collective responsibility to strengthen accessibility across Canada by ensuring that necessary funding for library services, books and essential information is provided for accessible formats so that blind and partially sighted Canadians have the same opportunity as fully sighted people to read.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Dhillon moves private member's notice of motion number 128. Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'm very proud to bring forward this resolution on behalf of the thousands of people who are blind and partially sighted in Ontario and across Canada. I would like to recognize, first of all, a few special visitors in the members' gallery. Representing the CNIB are Margaret McGory, Karen Madho and Martin Courcelles. I wish to welcome them to Queen's Park and thank them for the work they do every day on behalf of blind and partially sighted Canadians. Thank you very much for coming here today.

My resolution calls on all levels of government to strengthen accessibility across Canada so that those who are blind or partially sighted will have access to books in formats that will allow them to read. Certainly, all Ontarians have a right to read. They must have access to these materials. It is unacceptable to deny a blind or partially sighted person the right to read because it is

inconvenient or too costly to provide materials in a format that is accessible to them.

Our province funds libraries. On a yearly basis, local libraries purchase books so that our community members can enjoy the joys of reading. Why should someone who is blind or partially sighted be denied the same opportunity? There is simply no excuse. We have a collective responsibility across this province and across this country to ensure that anyone who wants to read will not be denied that right because their book, magazine, newspaper etc. is not available in a format that is accessible for them to read. Only 5% of materials in print are available in alternative format. This is a very low number.

In a 2003 speech to Library and Archives Canada, Jim Sanders, the then president and CEO of CNIB, spoke of the need for a multi-jurisdictional network of equitable library services for people with print disabilities in Canada. His dream was to be able to walk into his local library and receive the same access to services and books that every sighted person enjoys. He emphasized that equitable access to public libraries for all Canadians with print disabilities would only be possible when all the stakeholders are engaged and committed. These stakeholders include publishers, provincial and federal governments, the library sector and specialist libraries such as the CNIB.

I share Mr. Sanders's vision, and I believe that it is the responsibility of each level of government to make this possible. We have partners in the community that are advocating on behalf of the blind and partially sighted. Again, I would like to recognize the contribution of the CNIB. The CNIB is an organization that is dedicated to representing blind and partially sighted Canadians. The CNIB is Canada's largest producer of alternative-format reading materials, with an extensive collection which includes 80,000 alternative-format titles available on demand, Braille and electronic books, more than 50 newspapers in English and French, thousands of magazines, over 1,000 described videos, children's books in print-Braille format, and also, each year the CNIB library circulates 2.2 million items in alternative formats to Canadians at no cost.

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There are thousands of titles available only in antiquated analog format that await the resources to be converted to a digital format.

The CNIB launched a campaign called Right to Read. In this campaign, Canadians from across the country were encouraged to contact their provincial and federal representatives and urge them to support and sustain the CNIB library and the vital services they provide. I have heard from many of my constituents, and their voice is in unanimous support of this great campaign.

I am proud that our government has been and continues to be a strong advocate for the blind. I urge all stakeholders to take the initiative and support the blind and partially sighted people in their quest to read.

Most people are blessed with full vision. Many people who have difficulty seeing are able to use glasses as a corrective measure. However, people who are blind and

partially sighted cannot put on glasses to correct their vision. It is our collective responsibility to strengthen accessibility across Canada by ensuring necessary funding for library services, and that library services are provided in formats that the blind and partially sighted can use to read.

I ask for the support of this House in passing this resolution and, in doing so, sending a message across Canada that we stand with those who are blind and partially sighted and we will do whatever is necessary to allow them to read.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise and speak to this resolution to ensure that blind and partially sighted Canadians have access to library services, books and essential information. I think all members of this House would agree that providing that access is the right thing to do.

I would just like to put on the record the resolution that we're debating, and I just want to refer to it a little bit in that context. The resolution is that, in the opinion of this House, all levels of government have a collective responsibility to strengthen accessibility across Canada by ensuring necessary funding for library services, books and essential information is provided for accessible formats so that blind and partially sighted Canadians have the same opportunity as fully sighted people to read. I think this is a very important resolution, and I thank the member for putting it forward. But it isn't just good enough to have a resolution that we agree with doing that. I think we need to do something more. In fact, I think the resolution is such that the honourable member who brought the resolution forward would expect that no one in this House would disagree with this resolution—because I think, as he said in his presentation, that it should be a right of every Canadian to have the same access.

This isn't just about books for entertainment. This is about ensuring that vision challenges do not prevent people from reading and learning. It's about textbooks, instructional guides, newspapers and magazines. This is about giving visually impaired people the tools to participate fully in society and in our workforce.

However, I do have some concerns with the way this resolution is written, and that's why I read it into the record. It doesn't offer a strategic plan for how to ensure that accessibility. A vague phrase such as "all levels of government have to do something" won't achieve much if there are no specific responsibilities assigned to anyone. I think everyone will agree that someone else is doing it and no one will get it done. It's absolutely impossible to disagree with the member from Brampton West, but it's also hard to understand what needs to be done by this resolution.

This resolution sounds great, but it doesn't help us reach any solutions. It doesn't tell us what we need to do to put this information in the hands of blind and partially sighted Canadians.

Today, over 800,000 visually impaired Canadians are in urgent need of basic resource information; 3.4 million more have sight-threatening eye disease that might limit their ability to read, and these numbers are growing rapidly every day. I do agree that the federal, provincial and territorial governments must all work together in order to provide full accessibility across the country. We have a problem here. We need a clear solution, not empty talk. We need a plan, not a vague commitment to throw money at the problem.

As the member said in his introduction to the bill, the CNIB, or the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, has been providing services for the visually impaired for over 90 years. I want to commend them for their commitment and their excellent work. As part of the service, CNIB has successfully operated Canada's largest library of Braille and accessible audio, funded entirely through donations at a cost of about \$10 million a year. They recently announced that the charity can no longer provide that library service without getting ongoing government support. Today, Canada is the only G8 country that does not have public funding for any library service for visually impaired people.

I want to commend the many provinces that have already made the commitment to assist the CNIB. We do have a responsibility to ensure that services like this continue to be provided to the people who need them. But at the same time, I hope that instead of simply writing a cheque, we will stop and look at the situation and whether anything can be done to once again make it viable for the non-profit sector to deliver the services they've been delivering for so many years. We should remember that fully accessible libraries are only part of the solution for visually impaired Canadians.

We also want to recognize that other important organizations are also doing their part to ensure that visually impaired Canadians have access to information, organizations like The Accessible Channel, known as TACtv, which broadcasts descriptive programming for people who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing; and VoicePrint, which for many years has broadcast readings of full newspaper articles from more than 600 of Canada's newspapers and magazines into Canadian homes. As technology improves, there are many more options to guarantee that visually impaired Ontarians have access to all the information they need. Until that time, we need to ensure that there is a plan and then ensure that it has been appropriately funded.

We know that the Liberal government likes to spend the taxpayers' dollars first and ask questions later—that's why I brought this thing up about a plan. They are funding some of this spending with their massive HST. I think we want to bring that into this discussion. I find it a little ironic that this resolution came forward from a member of the Liberal Party when only a few months ago, they were scaring visually impaired Canadians with the news that the cost of audio books was going to increase by 8%—ironically one of the very items addressed in this resolution.

When the McGuinty government first announced the HST tax grab, it was obvious they hadn't considered the impact on Ontarians. They hadn't considered the fact that many Ontario families are already struggling to make ends meet; they hadn't considered the impact of taking the point-of-sale exemption away from our farmers; they hadn't considered the impact of increasing the cost of audio books for the visually impaired; and they hadn't considered how angry the people of Ontario would be that Dalton McGuinty was trying to tax their morning cup of Tim Hortons coffee.

It took almost eight months of questioning by the opposition before the McGuinty government finally admitted a little bit of their mistake and exempted a few more items, like that morning cup of coffee. At the same time, they finally clarified that they wouldn't be taxing audio books. I do not understand why it took so long for the member opposite and his party to realize that 800,000 blind and partially blind Ontarians shouldn't be the ones to be burdened with this giant tax grab.

A study by the Canadian Association of Optometrists revealed that by the age of 75, "one in four Canadians will experience vision loss, defined as being no longer able to drive, read, watch TV ... or see the faces of loved ones." Access to library resources and television for the visually impaired becomes more and more essential. That is why I am pleased to see this issue being debated here today and why I hope that the government will develop a plan to ensure that this information and these resources are available to everyone in need. It's also why I will be supporting this resolution to carry this issue forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I will be supporting the motion. I will have a few criticisms, of course, of the government as I do this. I was conserving my energy from the previous bill in order to apply it to this one. I could have done the reverse, I suppose, but I felt this particular motion required a little more attention.

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The member is well intentioned in this regard, no doubt, and I applaud him for introducing it, but I do have some concerns about the motion as it is written. I can't help but wonder why the member opposite, as an experienced parliamentary assistant in a number of ministries, would word this motion to include federal and municipal governments when the provincial government has so much work to do to reach its own accessibility targets.

It is the province that sets the rules for libraries through the Public Libraries Act, and that sets the vision for access with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. What the motion should have done is call on the province to live up to the spirit and intent of our own rules and lead by example. To indirectly attack our municipal partners for accessibility shortfalls when the province fails to meet its own requirements, in my mind, defies logic.

I agree with him that the federal government has been negligent, if not irresponsible, in its approach to the

issues—i.e., they spend no money on this particular issue—but the municipalities are slightly different, I dare say. The question I ask is, does the Public Libraries Act set aside money for accessibility purposes? The answer is no. I'm convinced that the member from Brampton West knows this, but I raise the question anyway.

Our municipalities have done an outstanding job with our libraries. Libraries continue to be a community hub, because they've done an excellent job with the limited resources they have. I see the amazing tools they make available to our communities: everything from books and magazines to various forms of digital media, computer access and all types of educational programming provided either free or at very low cost. Our municipal partners are doing their best to live up to their end of the bargain and have proven that they are up to the challenge of stretching dollars to ensure that Ontarians receive the best services available.

It isn't our direction they need—they are fully aware of the task at hand—but the funding necessary to take on the job that lies ahead. Our library services take great pride in their ability to provide access to information and would gladly take on the challenge of improved access for visually impaired Ontarians. If history is any indicator, they're doing it efficiently and effectively. For our municipal library services, the issue is not a matter of intent but a question of resources or lack thereof.

Can the province help libraries continue to do the excellent work they already do? Are they prepared to provide our municipal partners with the funds necessary to meet the challenge of accessibility for visually impaired Ontarians? Is Ontario ready to fulfill its commitment to equal access to all citizens? This is the challenge that the motion should call on the Legislature to meet.

I want to thank our assistant Kevin, who has done some of the work I'm about to quote.

Understandably, there is a cost related to transcribing text to formats suitable for visually impaired Ontarians. At one time, the CNIB used to offer transcription services on the basis of demand by outside agencies, but they no longer run the program after funding cuts and the emergence of for-profit companies led to the closure of this initiative. The CNIB program was run on a subsidy or cost-recovery basis.

When the CNIB did run their program, it cost them \$1,500 to create a digital master that could be spun into accessible mediums—Braille, audiobooks and other formats—to assist the visually impaired. But the \$1,500 was only a start, as copying and reproduction fees were in addition to expenses incurred for the digital master file.

But even with the emergence of private sector operators, this is still a very specialized service with a much more restricted base than the market for, say, conventional publishers or copy houses. So, to get an idea of the costs, we made a few calls to Braille service agencies.

As this is a bilingual nation, and as section 20 of the Public Libraries Act requires library boards to provide services in French where appropriate, my office con-

tacted a couple of service providers to get a ballpark estimate of the costs necessary to support this motion.

Braille Jymico, based in Quebec, provided a quick rundown of the transcription costs on a per-page basis. As some of you may be aware, transcription costs depend largely on the nature of the book. For example, costs to generate Braille editions of math or science books start at a rate of \$7.50 per page and are more expensive than, say, novels or non-fiction, with a rate of \$6 per page. And that's just basic costs. Reproducing graphics in a math book—diagrams, figures and the like—costs \$10 a page. Graphic pages in biology books are \$15 a page. Maps and similar images found in texts like geography books can cost as much as \$18 per page. The average textbook or reference book is usually in excess of 100 pages, so it's not hard to see that the costs of even basic transcription would quickly add up. And if the transcription is of a geography-, math- or biology-based publication, those costs grow considerably.

Now, few people would argue with the concept of fully accessible library services. New Democrats understand the treasure that are our libraries and the incredible value that they provide to our communities. The problem is with the wording of this motion. Nowhere in the Ontario Public Libraries Act is funding set aside for accessibility services, and this motion does not call on the government to change the language and the regulations to ensure that our library networks are provided with the resources to meet the various access needs of visually impaired Ontarians.

Despite the promises to upload the download and all of the pomp and circumstance on the announcements and reannouncements that accompanied them, municipalities are still burdened with the responsibility to pay for a number of provincially mandated services. The glacial pace of your uploading commitments has still left them with difficult choices to make come budget time.

How is this motion any different than the downloading of previous governments? Sadly, in my view, it isn't very different at all.

And what about the McGuinty government's responsibility to accessibility under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act? While the act doesn't specifically address library materials, it can be argued that the legislation's mandate to provide access isn't limited to the physical structure but also speaks to an implicit obligation to ensure equal access to the resources inside.

Does this motion address the government's obligations stemming from this act and other laws on its own books? I argue that it doesn't do it at all and that the intent is not to do so at all. It simply calls on all governments to do something about this.

I have little doubt that the idea for this motion came from a genuine desire to expand access and to help those who are visually impaired, but the resolution would have benefited greatly from a bit more thought, a closer look at the existing responsibilities and mandates that are already on the books, and a challenge to government to live up to those provincial guidelines and commitments that are

already in place. Ontario has the jurisdiction and the power to help ensure that all Ontarians, including the visually impaired, enjoy the treasured resources that our local libraries provide.

1520

If we believe that improved access is the right thing to do, then it's time that the province took action on the things Ontario promised to do instead of passing this responsibility on to the levels of government. While I have agreed that the federal government has been negligent in this portfolio, those who have carried the load of public libraries are the municipalities. They cannot stretch the dollars any longer. They've done a tremendous job with our libraries and they still maintain a strong commitment to our libraries. But they cannot do it alone. They need the provinces, which have the genuine provincial mandate and responsibility, to help out. They have not done that and they have a poor record of doing this. So while I support this motion, I feel it's incumbent on me to remind the member from Brampton West that much of the work that he must do is to convince his colleagues, his ministers and the Premier that they've got to do a better job of this. If he had done that, this motion would be a little stronger.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: I do appreciate very much the opportunity to engage in this debate during private members' time. Private members' time is to provide a bill or a resolution of what the membership in this place think; it's the time in which we remove the shackles of party politics and we present the concepts that each of us come here—some even being sent by our special groups or our constituency or the passion that each of us brings. So I want to make sure that there's a reminder there of that so that we can continue the discussion.

Let me give you a little bit of a background as to why I immediately offered my services to the member from Brampton West, who is a friend of mine but also understands my background in this particular issue regarding the CNIB. I was a former president of the CNIB in the riding of Brant, home of Wayne and Walter Gretzky, who have an extremely strong affiliation to the CNIB. During the time I was president, it was in the last years of the Wayne Gretzky tournament for CNIB. I was very proud of the fact that during my presidency I was allowed by the family to reinstitute a different event altogether for Walter during his recuperation from the near-death experience of his aneurysm. He now supports the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the CNIB.

So I have an extremely strong attachment to this resolution. The two things that I will say above all are, not only that I will be supporting the resolution and its intent, but I would also suggest respectfully that we have the W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in my riding, which is world-renowned in its assistance of people that are visually impaired and blind.

What I would also like to suggest, respectfully, to my colleagues in the House is, I know the CNIB well and I

know that the issue that they are bringing before us is not done with the intent to inflame. They've made it quite clear that this is basically an education process to ensure that we are aware of the needs of those they serve; and they do a great job, by the way. They have asked us, as honourable members, to do our best not to inflame and finger-point, and to turn this into a resolution that can be used by all of us.

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Levac: This is the request of the CNIB, my friend.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But, David, they need money.

Mr. Dave Levac: My friend from Trinity-Spadina is upset that I'm trying to explain that the CNIB has requested that this not be turned into a finger-pointing exercise. So if he's got an issue, I want him to take it up with them, because what I am referring you to is the fact they don't want any fed bashing; they don't want any provincial bashing. They want to educate. They want to make sure. That's what the member's resolution is written and designed to do. It's designed to make sure that we are continuing to move forward.

There was a day where people who were blind were relegated to zero participation in our communities, but it was thanks to the work of the CNIB and its long history, and to those that were pioneers in bringing education to the people's front, that you didn't hide people with disabilities in the corner or ship them away to an institution. It was organizations like that that brought us to the forefront of why we're debating a resolution today. I compliment them. I compliment the member from Brampton West and I compliment his intention. I thank the CNIB for the work that they've done.

I can tell you for a fact that there are things happening that are making it move forward. They're reminding us that there is still more to do, and there's nothing wrong with that at all.

I would respectfully say to the member from Trinity-Spadina that I did not hear a condemnation of governments on his behalf. I did not hear that. I'm just saying it as a reminder that our intentions should not be to inflame. The idea is that we will get the job done when we work together, when governments of all stripes stand up and say, "We have a program that would be beneficial, and we are looking for everyone's support." Let's go ahead and do that. That's the concept that I believe we're debating this afternoon.

They're asking in the resolution for "all levels of government." I want to add to this, and I hope the member does not take offence. I believe it's the private sector as well, which has stepped forward in the past, and they have done a great job of supporting institutions like the CNIB. We continue to encourage them to do so.

If we can say, with all impunity, that governments can offer all of the programs that absolutely everybody in the province wants, we wouldn't be sitting here very much. We have to have the responsibility that comes with that, and that's what the CNIB is telling us. The CNIB is

telling us, "With this kind of funding, we can get this much accomplished." And it's inside and woven into our public library system, which I believe is another partnership that they've created. That is another issue that we need to make sure we reinforce.

I do agree with the member from Trinity-Spadina when he hails the municipalities for maintaining the libraries the way they do. They are supported at all three levels of government, some not so good as others and some in more percentages than others. Yes, we should be encouraging them to continue and to improve. But I think we should be very cautious not to turn this resolution into anything else than what it is, and that is an educational process to encourage all of us to work together, that allows us to see that a disenfranchised piece of our community is being left behind. I believe that everyone should have—and if not, I believe most do have—the philosophy that people should not be left behind.

I laud the member from Brampton West. I thank him for this resolution. I will be supporting him 100%. Again, thank you to the CNIB for the work that they do in all of our communities in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I also extend my welcome to the members of the CNIB here today and also congratulate the member for bringing forward this resolution in support of libraries for the issue with respect to the funding, and I think that's primarily the reason I'm standing here.

I had the privilege, before being elected here provincially, to serve on the provincial library board. I found that to be an important part of how people and the community have access to information.

What this really points up today is access for all people—persons with special needs, physical needs—and that's part of what the government, I should think, should be trying to do.

But if you look at the funding of libraries in the province of Ontario, there is a serious problem there. I want to commend the federal government. This has all come about, even this resolution that Mr. Dhillon has brought forward, as a result of the actions, I believe, of the CNIB. They have lobbied, if that's the correct word, or at least educated. All members have probably received letters and information packages to encourage this partnership.

I'm going to read just one of the many, many letters I've received from constituents. Whatever you're doing, we have a debate here today and we're participating in it.

One section here says: "I urge you to accept the short-term cost-sharing partnership that CNIB is proposing between CNIB and Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments. Under this partnership CNIB would commit to providing a total of \$2.7 million in 2010-11, while your government's share would be \$4 million.

"Most people in Canada enjoy a taxpayer-funded library service, the very backbone of education, employment and an equal playing field in our society. But for

those who cannot read print because of vision loss or another disability, the benefits of libraries are missing. We must support the CNIB library.”

1530

You know, it's quite interesting, because I had the occasion in the past to visit a very important facility, Rotary Cheshire Homes, in North York. That's a really exceptional facility, a residence for persons who are deaf and blind. It's an inspiration to attend a facility like that, for those of us who don't often have a deeper insight. The work that they do at the Canadian Helen Keller Centre allows people to live independently.

This particular aspect of access to information is, in fact, even in the world of technology. We see the software program JAWS and others that allow larger print and manipulate data so it's readable or audible. That's the future. This funding will go a long way, I'm sure, to build these tools that are so essential to be more inclusive of people who have these special needs.

It's not always the age of people as they get older. It has been said that by 75, one in four people are going to be affected. I think even young children who have visual problems or auditory problems—these are the kinds of environments we're living in. The software tools available today to turn print into voice and voice into print—and large print—are the way of the future.

I think this initiative today by Mr. Dhillon is the right thing. I would be supportive of it, but at the same time remind your minister that they have a duty. By and large libraries are funded either municipally or provincially—most importantly, provincially. Often it's on the basis of circulation. But it should be on the number of books and access to the tools like software that make things like this more accessible.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on this private member's bill this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir maintenant de soutenir mon collègue de Brampton West, M. Vic Dhillon. Comme vous le savez, selon l'avis de cette Chambre, tous les trois niveaux de gouvernement ont une responsabilité collective de renforcer l'accessibilité à travers le Canada en assurant les financements nécessaires pour qui les services de bibliothèque, les livres et les informations essentielles soient fournis sous un format accessible, pour que les aveugles et les malvoyants canadiens aient les mêmes opportunités que les autres.

You've seen the resolution brought forth by my honourable colleague from Brampton West with regard to empowering and facilitating a community that not only contributes vigorously to Ontario but also is in need of remedy with regard to certain aspects of their interaction with society—their engagement, for example with reading material, which is the issue specifically addressed here. Hopefully, as we bring forward and support this resolution, we'll be able to aid the community as

we should, as honourable representatives of the people of Ontario.

At the outset, I would, first of all, like to acknowledge as well the various members of the CNIB who are ably represented here as well, but particularly to recognize Madame Karen Madho, who I recognize from a previous incarnation when she was serving that very noble institution known as the OMA, the Ontario Medical Association. As well, I'd like to broadly salute the CNIB because, as a graduate of the University of Toronto faculty of medicine, med school, here in Toronto, I know that there were many opportunities for us to learn, not only formally, through representatives of the CNIB. They also had an extraordinary volunteer corps and, of course, exploited to very best advantage their exact proximity to Sunnybrook hospital, one of the major teaching hospitals at the University of Toronto, on Bayview Avenue, as you know, where the CNIB itself is located. It was really, truly an eye-opener, if I may say that with, I suppose, pun intended, with reference to the difficulties and the challenges, and I would even say the quiet suffering and the quiet nobility, that many of the sight-challenged members of Ontario exhibit on a day-to-day basis.

I'd also like to just recognize for a moment one of our honourable colleagues here in the Legislature, the Honourable Alvin Curling, who I happened to bump into once again, at a reception at the consulate general of Pakistan, actually, over the weekend. It was Alvin Curling as, I believe, the representative of Scarborough—Rouge River who in my hand, probably 20 years or so ago, put the first card which had these—it was a tactile card, a “feelable” card, and upon inquiring what it was, because I don't think I'd ever seen it before, it was a card in Braille. It hit me then that here was a gentleman who really strove to represent all members of his community. I'm very pleased to see that many other colleagues of ours and of course ministers and different levels of government at all three levels in Ontario and Canada are actually participating in that type of outreach.

This initiative brought forth by my honourable colleague Vic Dhillon with regard to the CNIB's initiative of striving to bring the right to read to sight-challenged communities, I think, is not only needed, its time has come. It is really a mark of a sensitive, a just society—the phrase of Pierre Elliott Trudeau—and certainly part of the vision, literally—pun intended again—of the McGuinty government.

I bring to your attention, for example, a letter which is copied not only to my colleague Vic Dhillon but also initially addressed to Premier McGuinty, from the CNIB, and it says something to this effect:

“I understand ... that your government has committed to provide funding in support of local library access to CNIB library services for people who are blind, partially sighted or otherwise print disabled.

“I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the leadership your government has shown by supporting our residents with vision loss and other print disabilities.

“By committing to a cost-sharing partnership between CNIB and Canada's federal, provincial and territorial

governments, you are sustaining a lifeline for people who cannot read print because of vision loss or other print disabilities.”

I think that letter, no doubt full of ongoing heartfelt sentiments from the CNIB and the various people they represent, is something our government not only will act on, but also is broadly supporting today’s resolution.

With that, I would also compliment our colleague across the floor, Mr. Marchese from Trinity–Spadina, who, in an entirely legitimate and welcome way, does point the direction, as well as point fingers, with regard to opportunities that we should have and will have, hopefully, as this government moves forward with regard to concretizing, making real on the ground these initiatives—meaning bringing forth funding and, yes, calling upon other levels of government, federal and municipal, to really bring the finances to bear on this particular resolution, so that at the end of the day, it is not merely poeticism and flowery words but something that actually affects the lived experience of our blind and sight-challenged communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Dhillon, you have two minutes for your response.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: First of all, I’d like to thank the members from Brant, Etobicoke North, Oxford, Trinity–Spadina and Durham for their input because some very valuable information was shared on this topic.

With our challenges and responsibilities in life, I think we tend to forget sometimes about the people with sight difficulties who live in our communities, and from time to time I think we should all step back and look at life in their shoes because I firmly believe that, together, we really can make a difference.

I ask once again that this House support this resolution and send a strong message to other levels of government that they need to act and act now and support those who need the support the most.

Once again, I’d like to thank our folks from the CNIB for coming here today and being present during this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you very much.

You’re not going to like this, but the time for private members’ public business has not expired. Standing order 98 requires that two and a half hours elapse from the time we begin private members’ public business. That’s to give people who are in their offices or who are coming in and out some certainty of when the votes would occur. The two and a half hours doesn’t expire until 4 o’clock, at which time we will vote. The House is suspended until 4 o’clock.

The House suspended proceedings from 1539 to 1600.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I’d ask members to take their seats.

The time provided for private members’ public business has expired.

ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will deal first with ballot item number 61, standing in the name of Mr. Shurman.

Mr. Shurman has moved private members’ notice of motion number 93. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

ZERO WASTE DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA JOURNÉE

« ZÉRO DÉCHET »

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We’ll now deal with ballot item number 62, standing in the name of Mr. Kular.

Mr. Kular has moved second reading of Bill 247, An Act to proclaim Zero Waste Day. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Kular, would you like the bill to go to committee?

Mr. Kuldip Kular: General government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): To the general government committee? So ordered.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We’ll now move to the final ballot item, ballot item number 63.

Mr. Dhillon has moved private members’ notice of motion number 128. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. John O’Toole: On a point of order, Speaker: I wondered if you could clarify for me that it’s the intention next week for the House leaders to prorogue the Legislature. Could I be confident in saying to the media today that none of these bills will be on the order paper as of next Thursday and all of these bills will be cancelled?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That’s not a point of order for the Speaker to be concerned with. I suggest you speak with your House leader or the government House leader.

All matters relating to private members’ public business having been completed, I do now call orders of the day.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1603.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

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Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

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Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Hon. / L'hon. Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

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Murray, Glen R (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O’Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
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Peters, Hon. / L’hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l’Assemblée législative
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		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L’hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L’hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Takhar, Hon. / L’hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Wilkinson, Hon. / L’hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l’Assemblée
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L’hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Yakubski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l’opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	
Vacant	Leeds–Grenville	
Vacant	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	

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First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

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Lundi 1^{er} mars 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 1 March 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 1^{er} mars 2010

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

WEARING OF TEAM CANADA HOCKEY JERSEY

Mr. Paul Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Due to the wonderful results yesterday for our Canadian athletes, I ask unanimous consent to be able to wear the Team Canada jersey in the House today for our national women's and men's teams that won the gold medals.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to welcome some very special guests to the members' gallery who are visiting us today in honour of Epilepsy Awareness Month. Their delegation is led by Margaret Maye, of the Epilepsy Cure Initiative, who has been a tireless advocate around epilepsy. Also here championing this important cause are various branches of Epilepsy Ontario, including Toronto, York, Durham and Halton-Peel, and most importantly, Margaret's son Thomas and her spouse, Gary Neumann, are here with her today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of the member from Mississauga South to welcome members of the Probus Club of Mississauga South. There are 29 of them here at Queen's Park today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

JOE THORNTON AND JIM WAITE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I think all members want to congratulate Canada for its fine showing at the Olympics, and we're especially proud of the Ontario representatives.

I just want to take this opportunity to recognize Joe Thornton, from my hometown of St. Thomas, for his efforts in winning the gold medal for men's hockey, and Jim Waite, also from St. Thomas, who is the coach of the Canadian curling team.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Acting Premier: What Dalton McGuinty says in his throne speeches simply cannot be trusted. On page 9 of the 2007 throne speech, Dalton McGuinty said that Ontario families will get the health care they need when they need it, but the number of Ontario patients you are sending to the United States for cancer and cardiac care has increased by a shocking 450%.

Acting Premier, why didn't you tell Ontario patients they would have to drive to the United States to get the care they need when they need it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Fewer Ontarians than ever have to do that because of the investments this government has made, investments that that member and his party voted against. Let me just remind him: We have funded 1.69 million new procedures, which have resulted in a 63% decrease in the angiography wait time, a 50% decrease in the wait time for angioplasty, a 67% decrease in the wait time for cataract surgery, a 56% decrease in the wait time for hip replacement, a 60% decrease in the wait time for knee replacement and a 48% reduction in the wait time for CT scans.

This government has more to do; I acknowledge that. We will continue to make the investments in health care that are vital to a vibrant and efficient system. I invite that member and his party to quit voting against them and tell us what they would do to improve them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: These are your own numbers: a startling 450% increase in the number of Ontario families going across the border for health care treatment.

On page 9 of your last throne speech, you said you would expand emergency rooms, but in fact, you've closed emergency rooms in communities like Fort Erie and Port Colborne, with more to come.

The number of Ontario families who have crossed the border for health treatment has grown so much that a new industry of Dalton McGuinty health brokers has been developed. If you don't want to wait in a line of 140,000 people for an MRI for 110 days, you can pay a Dalton McGuinty health broker \$700 to get an MRI in Michigan tonight, and chances are he'll take you right to the front door.

Acting Premier, it could have been stated in your throne speech under "Health" or "Economic Develop-

ment,” but why did your throne speech not mention that you are going to rely on Dalton McGuinty US health brokers?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government has increased funding for hospitals by 42%, but we acknowledge that there are enormous challenges. In their SCFEA report today, they talk about holding expenses to last year’s level. That speaks of a decrease to hospitals. That member and his party ought to tell us what their secret agenda is. When they say to cut expenditures, they’re talking about health care. They’re all over the map. One day they want to spend more, and the next day they want to cut more.

That member and his party have no plan; they have no idea how to get us back to balance, but they certainly have a record. They have a record of closing hospitals, of firing nurses, of insulting health care professionals, teachers and others. This government and its Premier have a plan; that party and that leader have no plan and no idea how to get back to balance. The people of Ontario know who they can trust: It’s Dalton McGuinty.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The minister is probably well aware that EcuMedical is a Dalton McGuinty US health broker in your own riding of Windsor. Companies like EcuMedical—these new McGuinty health brokers—have taken some 12,000 Ontario patients and families across the border into the United States because they can’t get the service in Dalton McGuinty’s Ontario.

While the LHINs are fattening up in the bureaucracy, 12,000 Ontario families have been forced to use Dalton McGuinty health brokers to seek service in the United States—up a startling 450% since these guys took office. Even the Ombudsman said, “It’s as if” the McGuinty Liberals “hand a dying cancer patient a Rubik’s cube and they’ve got to figure it out themselves. It’s a real cruel game.” Of course, they’re going to fire the Ombudsman.

If you can’t keep your promises in the 2007 throne speech, why should we believe a word that you’re going to say this coming Monday?

1040

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The people of Ontario know they can trust Dalton McGuinty with their health care system.

Laughter.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite laughs, but let’s take a trip down memory lane. Let’s go down memory lane and look at what he did to our province’s health care system. If we did what—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Let’s look at the record. If we did what that member said, that is, hold the rate of spending in inflation in health care, we would have 10,000 fewer nurses. We don’t agree with you, Mr. Hudak. We don’t want 10,000 fewer nurses. It would mean 1,795 fewer doctors. We don’t agree with that member. We believe in investing in health care. This government, this

party, this leader have laid out a plan for health care that doesn’t involve closing hospitals like he did—39 of them. It doesn’t matter—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question—and I will remind members that we use the riding names.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Minister, I can’t believe you said that people expect Dalton McGuinty to keep his word. Give me a break. What they can expect from Dalton McGuinty is for him to break his promises, to say one thing and to do another, and to promise not to increase taxes but then to hit Ontario families with two of the biggest tax increases in the history of the province, while running up the debt and sending some 450% more Ontario patients across the border to try to seek critical care. Clearly, what Dalton McGuinty says cannot be trusted.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Deputy Premier: On page 6 of your previous throne speech, you said you would support innovation and create high-paying jobs through a new \$165-million Ontario venture capital fund. Could you inform the House, in the last three years exactly how many entrepreneurs and start-up firms have actually received any cash from this fund?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have, through a variety of initiatives, invested not only in the forestry sector and the manufacturing sector, but in a variety of high-tech industries that are part of the growth industry.

There is no doubt that there have been challenges in the economy; we acknowledge that. Far too many jobs have been lost, as have been lost around the world.

This government has done things like investing in high-tech industry, like setting up Second Career, like making investments in our existing industries to keep them alive—

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Auto.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —the auto sector, which that member and his party voted against.

There’s no doubt that difficult choices have to be made. This leader, Premier McGuinty, has laid out a plan, and his government is implementing that. That leader, that party, have no plan, no idea how they’ll get us back to balance and no idea about how the future of this economy can grow. That’s why this party will continue to put forward the positive public policy initiatives that we have up until now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Hudak: No surprise the minister did not say one word about his failed Ontario venture capital fund. The answer to my question is, despite the announcement three years ago, they have announced a total of one single investment, and to date no money has flowed to that company, so you have not created a single job yet. However, Liberal insiders, Bay Street bankers and lawyers are collecting millions of dollars in commissions and fees for managing your failed fund. As of October 2008, some \$4

million had flowed to the bankers and lawyers, and not a single dime went to an entrepreneur or an innovator.

So I ask the Deputy Premier, were Liberal insiders, Bay Street backers and lawyers the jobs you were talking about in your throne speech?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Minister of Research and Innovation.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very pleased to correct the record of the Leader of the Opposition in terms of the Ontario venture capital fund. To date, the OVCF fund manager, Northleaf Capital, has publicly announced three funding commitments and made two direct investments totalling almost \$60 million. I'd like to share:

—up to \$15 million in Georgian Partners growth fund I. Georgian Partners is an Ontario-based venture capital firm investing in companies in the information technology, aggregation and enterprise software firms;

—up to \$20 million in EdgeStone Capital venture fund III. EdgeStone is an Ontario-based venture capital firm investing in early- and growth-stage Canadian information technology companies; and

—\$2 million to I Love Rewards, a direct company co-investment.

If the leader would like, I can also talk about the Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The only people benefiting from your failed venture capital fund are Liberal insiders, bankers and lawyers who have made millions of dollars in management fees from running your failed fund. You know, between 2000 and 2003, the Ontario PC government I was proud to be part of saw over \$7 billion of venture capital investment that helped to create hundreds of thousands of jobs for hard-working Ontario families in our province. Since Dalton McGuinty came into office, that has dried up completely—to the back of the pack in this entire country.

So I ask the Deputy Premier, when you made your throne speech promise, did you intend for Ontario entrepreneurs and innovators to still be searching for venture capital while only Liberal insiders on Bay Street got fat and rich on those insider funds?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to talk about the emerging technology fund, which was set up with the support and the encouragement of those in the financial community. What it does is, it reaches out to venture capitalists and partners with them. We pre-approve them and they come forward with deals which we look at and partner with them.

I'd like to talk about Ecobee Inc., a Toronto-based company that helps homeowners conserve energy, save money and reduce their environmental impact with smart thermostats they can access from their home computers, smartphones or via any web browser. Ecobee is an award-winning company, and thanks to Ontario's emerging technologies fund they were able to raise \$6.73 million venture capital financing.

Bering Media Inc.: Their investment will help expand their engineering and marketing teams. Bering Media's technology allows online ads to be targeted geographically, right down to the neighbourhood level that doesn't compromise privacy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Across Ontario, people are seeing clinics closing, surgery cancelled and nurses laid off. The Queensway Carleton Hospital cancelled nine of their 14 surgeries last Friday. Their emergency room is backed up, and they are at 113% occupancy rate. What is the government plan to improve patient care at Queensway Carleton Hospital?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite is talking about the things that hospitals are doing right across this province to get their spending under control. We have expanded hospital funding by 42% over the last six years. That kind of spending growth simply cannot continue. The hospitals are working as partners with government to look very closely at their budgets, to look at other opportunities in the health care system so that they can bring their spending under a reasonable rate of growth. But we are committed to maintaining the very highest quality of care for patients in this province. We publicly report on important indicators of quality for patients. We will continue to do that. As we move forward, we will work in partnership with hospitals and others in the health care sector to ensure the highest possible quality of care for patients.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The government announced 9,000 new nursing positions. Yet, in the latest in a slew of nursing cuts, late last week the Ottawa Hospital announced they are cutting 190 nursing positions. What does the minister think these cuts will do to occupancy rates, emergency room backup, cancelled surgeries and quality care in general in the hospitals in the Ottawa region?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said in the first question, we are working very closely with the hospitals through the LHINs, which have responsibility for the full spectrum of health care. It's critically important that we make the right investments to improve quality of care for patients.

We publicly report on several indicators of quality of care. We publicly report on how long it takes to get surgeries. We publicly report on infection rates. We're working very hard now to bring down the wait times in our emergency departments. Those to me are the indicators that are meaningful for the public. We can talk about how many dollars. We can talk about jobs. The issue is, are we delivering the highest possible quality of care to the public? The answer is yes.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France G  linas: The stories of long delays in emergency rooms, of occupancy overcrowding, of cancelled surgery, are being repeated in communities across this province.

Ontarians deserve better than this. They expect to see a solution from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care that can ensure access to quality care across the system, not the stopgap, politically motivated measures that we have seen.

When will the people of Ottawa and communities across the province see a plan from this government to maintain access and to stop the loss of health care services across this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I simply would urge the member opposite to look at the facts. We are bringing down wait times in emergency departments across the province. I would urge the member opposite, or the members of the public maybe, without having to go through that process, to go directly to the Ministry of Health website. You can check the hospital in your neighbourhood and you can track improvements in wait times over time.

We have gone from a system where we knew through anecdotal information that there were problems but we didn't actually have measures. We now measure, we publicly report and we are seeing improvements in those wait times. That is better health care for Ontarians.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Acting Premier. According to a survey released on Friday, half of Canadians over 50 years old are not confident they'll be able to retire comfortably, and two thirds say the current pension system is inadequate. Where is the McGuinty government Liberal plan for a secure retirement for every Ontarian?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have laid out a series of reforms on the administration of our pension system, which is an important first step. We have called for a national summit on pension reform, which will begin with the Council of the Federation meeting this summer. We have dealt with the first part of a pension reform bill, which will be an important part of defined benefit plans going forward. But I concur with those, and this government concurs with those who are concerned around the adequacy of savings. It's less about pensions and more about post-retirement income, because less than 30% of us have a pension here in Ontario.

These are important issues. They require a thorough provincial and national dialogue. Ontario has been leading that. We will continue to do that. As we do that, we will make the changes necessary to help ensure a better future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The minister knows that two thirds of Ontario families do not have a workplace pension. That's four million people who will be robbed of the

security and dignity they deserve in the retirement years. That's simply not good enough.

The NDP has proposed an Ontario retirement plan to make sure all Ontarians who have worked hard their entire lives can retire with some dignity. When is this government going to stop defending a status quo that isn't working and take decisive action like implementing our Ontario retirement plan?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite will know that in my first answer, I did acknowledge that very few of us actually have a pension. I will say this—and I did congratulate the NDP on putting out a proposal. That proposal has challenges to it, as, by the way, do any proposals you're looking at. There is no silver bullet to fix this challenge. It involves a variety of policy initiatives at the federal and provincial level, and it's more about post-retirement income than it is about pensions, because the member is right: Less than 30% of us have a pension.

We will continue to amend the Pension Benefits Act. We will continue to work with our colleagues across the country as we explore ways of helping to ensure that the enormous progress we've made in the last 40 years on the pension front continues for the next 40 years. I concur with the member: It's an enormous challenge. It requires a thorough debate both here in Ontario and across Canada, and I can assure you the government of Ontario will continue to be at the front of that debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: This government talks a lot about bold action. Apparently that means arrogantly ramming through policies that nobody wants or are just administrative while staying quiet on the things that matter most to us. Our Ontario retirement plan would provide people with \$600 to \$700 per month; it has been reviewed by your experts—your own experts—who say it's solid and exactly what Ontario needs.

Will this government support our plan that will provide four million Ontarians with the security and dignity they deserve in their retirement years, or will they carry on showing no leadership and leave two out of three people without a plan?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, the experts have raised some legitimate concerns around the plan they put forward.

Again, there is no silver bullet to this. In the last year, for instance, the NDP government said there were five plans that were too big to fail 12 years ago. All five of them failed, and we spent our time trying to address those. We did that. They didn't support us in that.

I think Ontarians understand the complexity of this, and I think they understand the importance of getting this right. Our pension and post-retirement system has taken some 40 years to evolve. It involved changes from a range of governments across jurisdictions.

There's no doubt that there's more to do. There's no doubt we have difficult choices ahead. This government will continue to lead on that file, both here in Ontario and

across Canada, to ensure that our seniors have a better future.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also for the Acting Premier. Why did the total investment in Ontario venture capital funds fall from \$1.5 billion in 2000 to just \$88 million in 2008?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Research and Innovation.

Hon. John Milloy: I've been very proud of the leadership our government has taken in terms of access to venture capital due to the downturn to the economy; it has been one part of the investment equation. The government has come to the table with two major funds. One is the Ontario venture capital fund. It was launched in 2008 as a fund of funds whereby investors pool their capital, investments are made in a range of venture capital and other private equity funds, and these underlying funds, in turn, make investments in companies. We went out and partnered with the private sector in order to put together this fund of funds, and, as I shared with the Leader of the Opposition, right now we have publicly announced three fund commitments and made two direct investments totalling almost \$60 million.

I'm pleased to say that the fund manager is currently conducting due diligence on a number of potential investments—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: The minister really has to start listening to these questions.

Things have gotten worse since 2008. Reports for the first three quarters of 2009 reveal that Ontario has fallen even further, to just \$29 million in investment for venture capital funds. Dalton McGuinty's initial plan to cancel Ontario PC tax credits is not the answer; it is hurting us. His next plan of reverse-Reagan investments and multi-billion dollar sweetheart deals with a foreign company isn't working either. Some \$29 million in total is proof that homegrown investors and homegrown companies have given up.

Why did you scrap an Ontario PC plan that worked for McGuinty Liberal plans that don't?

Hon. John Milloy: As Minister of Research and Innovation, I have the privilege to meet with the investment community on a regular basis, and I hear nothing but praise from the venture capital community and from the investment community in our province for the two funds we put together: the fund of funds and the emerging technologies fund.

Let me share with the honourable member a quote from the National Post, a paper he probably enjoys reading. Rick Segal, founder and CEO of Fixmo, had this to say: "Canada is the best place on the planet to start a business.... The government programs available to entrepreneurs in Canada are amazing, and give us a competitive advantage...." He was speaking about the type of

programming that has come forward: the Ontario emerging technologies fund and the Ontario venture capital fund, which right now, as I've shared, has announced a number of investments and is in the process of meeting with other potential investors as we move forward.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Last week, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal affirmed what we have known since your government took office: that our most vulnerable Ontarians still cannot put healthy food on their tables. The meagre special diet allowance has never supported an adequate, healthy diet for those who need it the most. It was made even worse after your so-called reforms. For example, people living with high blood pressure receive only one eighth the support they need for a healthy diet.

Will this minister confirm today that she intends to uphold the tribunal's ruling and give every needy citizen the resources they need to have a healthy diet, or do you intend to go off and appeal this too?

1100

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's a very good question, and thank you very much for asking this question. We have just received, yes, a decision from the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal with regard to the special diets. This issue is a complex issue, and, yes, the decision is about three special diet allowance test cases. We are reviewing this decision. It's a complex decision that could have a significant fiscal, policy and regulatory impact.

But something that I can say is this government has a priority to reduce poverty in Ontario. We have this strategy we are working on, and since we came to power, we gave an 11% increase in social assistance—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: It seems to me from the minister's words that she intends to reduce poverty on the backs of the poor. I am speaking on behalf of tens of thousands of Ontarians with health problems which can be managed by eating healthy foods on a daily basis. Each and every day they need to eat healthily. A small investment is what it will take to ensure that people won't become sicker while they depend on the very government that should be assisting them, not standing in their way. This is a no-brainer.

Will this government commit today to obey the ruling and help those people manage their health conditions by providing an adequate special diet allowance, or are you going to appeal it again?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Fighting poverty is a priority for this government. I just want to remind the member of the opposite party that when we came into power, the budget for a special diet was around \$6 million; today it's over \$200 million.

We have received good advice from the Auditor General. We've received good advice about a special diet.

We put forward a team to review it. We are going to review the decision and will make a decision later on if we are appealing it or not.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Labour. In my riding of York South–Weston, we have residents who work in the construction sector, on factory lines, others in retail and many responsible for administrative duties in offices. They are a vital part of Ontario's professional workforce and make a significant contribution to our province. Workers in many of these jobs are at risk of and develop repetitive strain injuries which happen because of the constant use and strain on the same body parts. These types of injuries may not be life-threatening, but they can be very painful and certainly do have a significant impact on a person's quality of life. Yesterday, February 28, marked the 11th annual International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day.

Minister, can you please tell us what is being done to curb these types of injuries?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member, and I want to thank her for her advocacy on behalf of her constituents. I am so pleased to announce in this House that we've added yet another resource to our arsenal in our fight against musculoskeletal disorders. The Ministry of Labour has launched a new interactive tool on our website on our Pains and Strains in the Workplace page. The tool features a musculoskeletal figure, and with a click on the various body parts of that figure, you can get information on the common types of MSDs and how to avoid them.

The member is right that these injuries can cause a tremendous amount of pain and suffering for workers afflicted by MSDs. However, with the use of this tool and with precautions and by taking preventive measures, many of these—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Minister. These types of injuries often start as minor injuries, but they can quickly turn into something more serious. They are taking a tremendous human and financial toll on our workforce, and this is evident in the statistics. In 2008, 33,000 workers were affected, and 43% of all lost-time injuries involved these types of injuries. In Ontario it cost the economy more than \$2 billion between 2003 and 2008. Can the minister please tell us what kinds of tools and resources his ministry has made available to employers and employees to help prevent these injuries?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again I thank the member for the question on MSD, musculoskeletal disorder. This tool that we have will help those workers to avoid MSDs. As well, we have an enforcement blitz that will be launched in the province to attack MSDs. This is part of our Safe at Work Ontario strategy, which focuses on enforcement, on compliance and on partnership.

Our government is committed to ensuring that workers in this province are protected from injuries and major health hazards while on the job, and we continue to work closely with our health and safety partners, with employers and workers, to prevent MSDs and other injuries in the workplace. Ontario is one of the safest places in the world to work; we want to keep it that way.

I thank the member for the question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Acting Premier. I listened to the first NDP question about the Queensway Carleton Hospital and the Ottawa Hospital and I was completely and utterly dissatisfied with the answer given by the Minister of Health. I want to know, on behalf of my residents, what Dalton McGuinty is going to do to recover the \$1 billion wasted in the eHealth boondoggle so that it can be redirected to the Ottawa Hospital and the Queensway Carleton Hospital.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I actually welcome the question from this member because it gives me an opportunity to ask them to set the record straight. I have a press release here from the party opposite saying that they are going to freeze spending, that their plan is to freeze spending across the province. This is recent, by the way; this is from just a month ago. Earlier, we've heard that they want to cut spending on health care; now we're hearing that they want to increase spending. So I'm confused about the Tory math on this one. Is it a cut, is it a freeze or is it a spend?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Her answer is a joke and it is an insult to the people of Ottawa West–Nepean, Nepean–Carleton and the entire city of Ottawa.

I can tell you something: Beth Graham, our candidate, wrote earlier today to Dalton McGuinty asking him to use every tool at his disposal, every tool in the Premier's office, to recover the money that your party wasted on eHealth. I realize this means that you're going to have to ask some very tough and uncomfortable questions of George Smitherman, Karli Farrow and John Ronson, who are part of your Liberal family, but the reality is that the money handed out in sweetheart deals at eHealth came at a cost to Ontario families, Ottawa families, the Ottawa Hospital and Queensway Carleton Hospital.

My hospitals are seeing cuts to nurses. They have seen cancellations in their surgeries. So I want to know from you, Minister, if you have the guts to stand up and tell us that you will go out to the Liberal family and get that money for Ontario families.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, I certainly give the member opposite an A-plus for bluster.

This is a debate that we want to have in this province. We are working with the hospitals. We are working with the LHINs and the broader health care sector on a plan to bring hospital spending to a sustainable level. We are working hard and achieving that.

When it comes to the Ottawa Hospital, the member opposite might be interested to know that there are actually 30 nursing jobs online today at the Ottawa Hospital. We are continuing to improve health care. We have had this debate.

I would like the member opposite perhaps to explain this: This morning on CBC Radio in Ottawa there was a debate on health care. The Liberal candidate, Bob Chiarelli, was there; the NDP candidate was there. The Conservative candidate wasn't able to get there to have this debate that we need to have in this province.

1110

WASTE DISPOSAL

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Midland area residents have been fighting to stop the construction of a dump on site 41. Experts from across Canada have shown that the dump threatens a world-renowned watershed. Simcoe council has halted construction, but the possibility lives on that this dump will open because the certificate of approval has not been revoked.

Why won't the minister act once and for all and protect the Georgian Bay watershed by revoking the outdated certificate of approval?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I thank the member for the question because it gives us once again an opportunity to state unequivocally that if the county of Simcoe were to ask us to basically revoke that certificate, we would do that. But they've applied for a certificate that we looked at at the time and over the last 20 years, and we feel that site 41, from a scientific viewpoint, is an appropriate site. However, if they—Simcoe county—don't want to go ahead with it, it's entirely up to them. It's basically a local decision. They're the people who applied for the certificate and we approved the certificate using the best scientific information that's available. If they now want us to revoke that certificate, all they have to do is write us a letter asking for the revocation of that certificate, and we will comply with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Frankly, the site is not appropriate, and if this minister was exercising his responsibilities he would withdraw that certificate of approval.

There is a private member's bill, Bill 32, which calls for the withdrawal of the certificate of approval; it passed second reading. But just as the Liberal Peterson cabinet undermined democratic process by overturning the Environmental Review Tribunal's decision against the dump, the McGuinty government is killing the debate on dump 41 by proroguing the House and ending the discussion of Bill 32.

Why won't the government allow continued debate on Bill 32 and the future of dump site 41 by passing a motion to bring Bill 32 forward to the next session of the Legislature? Give us that answer.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Look, it is up to Simcoe county to basically decide as to what they want to do

there. All we can do is look at all of the available science that has been made there over the last number years. If Simcoe council were to ask us for a revocation of that certificate, we would do so. Within the Ministry of the Environment, we're only concerned about three things: number one, to have the cleanest air possible in the province of Ontario; to have the cleanest water possible in the province of Ontario; and to have the cleanest land possible. We are working on it on a day-to-day basis and we will continue to do so because environmental protection for the health and safety of Ontarians is paramount. We will continue to do that as time goes along.

GREENBELT

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question today is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This past Sunday marked the fifth anniversary of the greenbelt, which protects 1.8 million acres of land set aside by our government. This is truly something to celebrate. On behalf of all greenbelt advocates and supporters, I rise today to express how pleased we are with the progress made so far in conserving Ontario's natural capital.

In my riding of Ajax-Pickering, residents enjoy the recreational and aesthetic beauty of the greenbelt, along with local fresh fruits provided by the greenbelt farmers.

Minister, the population in Ontario, especially in the greater Golden Horseshoe, is growing steadily, with four million new residents expected over the next two decades. As you know, the Greenbelt Act was created to work in unison with Places to Grow. Minister, can you explain what effect these two acts will have on the urban environment in the province of Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thank the member very much for asking the question. The member for Ajax-Pickering is very knowledgeable in this matter. I want to say that at the time before the greenbelt was brought into effect, we had acres upon acres of prime farmland and environmentally sensitive areas being gobbled up through development. Because of the vision that the Premier of this province had that was put into effect through two pieces of legislation, the greenbelt legislation and Places to Grow, the growth is managed in a much better way so that environmentally sensitive areas and, of course, agricultural land that was being paved over, are now protected throughout the greenbelt. I know our many friends in the House who are from agriculture know how valuable that is. This legislation allowed us to protect that, and it's renowned around the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Minister, it is clear that the hard work of your ministry has paid off and that residents of the greater Golden Horseshoe have been provided with a smart approach to managing growth and preserving our farmlands and natural heritage in this province that we call home. Greenbelt expansion is another sign of the government's commitment, one which I welcome warmly.

I understand a study is being released today by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy comparing greenbelts worldwide. This study shows that Ontario's greenbelt ranks first for overall legal protection. This award reinforces that the present formula that this government is using has been working, but we need to look forward together and have a protective approach to improving the greenbelt for our children, the future of Ontario.

Minister, can you explain the next steps for the greenbelt?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, I want to say that the institute, I note, says our greenbelt legislation is the strongest in the world for supporting laws and policies.

But I want to say to the member that my ministry, along with our partner ministries, are pleased to assist municipalities in considering growing the greenbelt. We won't act alone; any request to amend the greenbelt plan will be carefully considered with input from municipalities, the public, the Greenbelt Council and aboriginal communities. And there is, clearly, interest at the municipal level in growing the greenbelt.

Only last Friday I had the opportunity, along with the mayor of Toronto, to announce that Toronto is proposing to add public lands—the Don and Humber River Valleys—to the greenbelt. This is a fitting way to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the greenbelt.

I understand that Halton regional council will soon be considering whether they wish to propose adding lands in the area of the greenbelt. Municipalities are clearly jumping on board, and because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Education. Your government says that it's important to be transparent and accountable; however, last year, 2009, I tabled 10 order paper questions to your ministry, and I've not received any responses yet. Now, with the House proroguing this Thursday, these questions, which seek information on topics such as bullying and special education needs, could go unanswered.

Minister, can you assure me that these 10 questions will be answered before the House prorogues on Thursday?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm very happy to have the opportunity to say to the honourable member that we do take order paper questions very seriously.

The honourable member has talked about the importance of transparency; I also think it's important that we are accurate. So what I can say to the honourable member is that we are working on those, and we are going to do everything that we can to get the answers and make sure that we have all of the information that we need to provide the most accurate information to the member.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Mr. Speaker, again through you to the minister: That doesn't provide much comfort to the people in the province of Ontario, because they're starting to take a look at this government and seeing that, in reality, they're only paying lip service to transparency and accountability. In fact, last week, we saw one of the ministers trivialize the whole issue of transparency.

Minister, it has now been 90 days and the questions remain unanswered. They are important. They relate to bullying and special education needs, to name but a few. Will you provide answers by Thursday, before the House prorogues? Or else, as you know, they will be lost.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I agree that we want to ensure that the people of Ontario have the very best, most accurate information available to them. And I have committed to the honourable member and to this Legislature that when we have that information, we will make it available.

Now, with respect to the procedural issue of prorogation, because we are proroguing on Thursday—

Hon. James J. Bradley: And coming back Monday.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: —and because we are coming back the next Monday, if those questions are lost on the paper, next week, the member can pose those questions again.

I commit that we will bring the same commitment to being accurate and accountable to the people of this province that we are bringing right now, today. That is what I'm able to say. We are working very hard to get the best answers for the honourable member. I've been on that side of the House; I know how important these questions—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1120

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Acting Premier. Premier, we learned last Friday that your government, with some \$81 million of assistance, helped to save some 700 jobs in Essex at the Ford plant.

You will know that Xstrata has announced that 700 people are to lose their jobs in Timmins. When can we expect similar help?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The government has made a range of investments over a number of programs. The program that the Ford money came out of was announced some years ago. A number of operations around the province have come to take advantage of assistance from this government, including many in the north.

The situation in Timmins is very difficult; I understand that. It is one that requires a full range of responses across governments, federally and provincially. The Premier spoke last week about the need to have a whole northern package in the upcoming budget and our desire to work with the north, not just in this particular circumstance, but in a range of circumstances that we find particularly challenging.

To the member opposite, and to the people of Timmins, we will continue to work with that community as we work through this difficult time. There are a range of things—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Acting Premier, the situation in Timmins is this: Xstrata is making money with the refinery smelter. They're not losing money. The reason that they're picking up and moving and consolidating to one operation is because you're allowing them to do it.

The people of northern Ontario are not asking for a large handout. What we want is your government to be engaged with us in discussions with Xstrata to put the pressure on them that needs to be put for them to keep that plant open. Should it shut, it's 700 direct jobs in the city of Timmins and region and probably 3,000 jobs overall, not to mention the loss of energy sold to that place as the largest customer for Ontario Hydro, as well as what it means to the revenue of the province of Ontario.

So I say again, are you prepared to engage in discussions with Xstrata so they don't shut this place down come May 14?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has been very active in those discussions with the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. This is a challenging circumstance. We will continue to work with the community. I remind the member opposite that we're now building the new Matagami waste water treatment plant, a \$20-million investment; the Barbers Bay bridge, another \$1.9 million; and a variety of school capital projects.

The challenges are real. I don't want to underestimate the importance of them. We will continue to work with the north, and we'll have more to say about these issues in the coming days. We look forward to continuing to build a stronger northern economy for all Ontarians.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East is a quickly growing group of vibrant communities. In fact, Pickering was identified as one of two urban growth centres in Durham region under the government's growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe.

My constituents rely on a variety of forms of travel to get to where they need to go. They use our network of roads and public transit to get to work, school and doctor's appointments or to visit family and friends, whether it's in Durham, the city of Toronto or other parts of the GTA.

Can the minister tell us what the government is doing to improve transit so my constituents and people across the region can get to where they need to go in the GTA as efficiently as possible?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member from Pickering-Scarborough East for the question. I think, in

this House and beyond, we can all recognize that this is a critically important time to develop the next era of transportation in our most populous region in Ontario. That's why we've committed over \$7.3 billion for transit, high-way infrastructure, municipal roads and bridges and other municipal capital projects in the GTA, including the cities of Toronto and Hamilton and the regions of Halton, Peel, York and Durham.

We're also looking at the bigger picture in terms of developing the transportation network that the member spoke about. That's why we've committed \$11.5 billion to the Move Ontario 2020 plan, which forms the foundation investment for transit projects identified by the Metrolinx regional transportation plan in the greater Toronto and Hamilton areas. Last year, in fact, the Premier announced that we're moving ahead with \$9 billion for priority transit projects identified in the Metrolinx plan, including the Scarborough rapid transit line.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Thank you, Minister, for that particular response. I'm pleased to hear of the work the government and Metrolinx are doing to strengthen public transit in the region, particularly the Scarborough line, of importance to my constituents in Scarborough. I know many of my constituents rely on transit to get to downtown Toronto and other parts of the GTA for work each and every day. In fact, the GO train is becoming an increasingly popular option for riders in my communities. They can avoid sitting in gridlock and help the environment by reducing emissions.

As the GO train becomes an increasingly popular option for commuters, would the minister tell us what the government and GO Transit are planning in regard to the pressures for more riders on the network's trains?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We know it's very important that GO make smart investments as ridership increases. In January 2009, GO added a new weekday east-bound train trip, operating an express from Union Station to Pickering GO station and making all the regular stops to Oshawa GO station. That means 1,400 more people will be riding public transit instead of driving their cars.

But beyond just the trains, there's also a need for those parking spaces so that people can get to the hub and then get on public transit. GO is working on expanding parking spaces at GO stations so we have enough spaces to accommodate all those new travellers. Last year, we made a \$500-million commitment with the federal government for GO Transit revitalization, and with this funding GO was able to add 4,950 new parking spaces at stations like Aurora, Maple, Bronte, Rouge Hill and Unionville. Most recently, GO announced the opening of a four-level parking lot at the Whitby GO station. So—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Dalton McGuinty's throne speech promises simply can't be trusted. The first

point in your five-point economic plan from 2007 promised to invest in education and skills. You did this by investing in your program called Second Career. However, graduates in my riding, and I'm sure across Ontario, can't find jobs. What they are finding is an increased number of graduates competing for a limited number of jobs.

Minister, what percentage of students who enrol in the Second Career program have found jobs in the fields in which they have been trained?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to report to the House, notwithstanding the calls from the honourable member's party to scrap the program, that since its introduction we have welcomed over 26,000 people to Second Career.

The honourable member raises a very important point as to what's happening to people who are in the Second Career program following the completion of their training. I would point out to the honourable member that, as members are familiar with from questions and discussion here in the Legislature, the great bulk of the people who entered Second Career happened last fall, which means that the vast majority of Second Career students are currently pursuing their training opportunities. We are working very, very closely as a ministry to follow these students through their courses, and I'll be able to report to the House as they begin to graduate as to their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's great that you've trained 26,000, Minister, but how many have found jobs? That's the question.

What are the graduates saying? I'm going to read a letter from one of my constituents, and I quote: "Since many of us were partially funded through this retraining, more monitoring should be done to make sure students have a chance to work in the field they studied in."

You said you have a plan. Ontarians enrolled in retraining should have some expectations of finding a job. Students need the best information and advice before they choose a career, along with help to enter the workforce. Minister, is it your plan that needs fixing, or how you have executed the plan?

Hon. John Milloy: Once again, I'm very proud that, despite the calls by the honourable member's party for the plan to be scrapped, we proceeded.

One of the key aspects of Second Career is that we make people go through a rather rigorous application process in which they must identify where there are potential job openings in their community and match them up with the training programs that they wish to pursue.

1130

As I say, it's still a little bit early in the game to come forward with statistics, but let me tell the honourable member about Barbara, a 46-year-old mother of two who was laid off from her job at a call centre. She began her studies in December at a private business college, in an office administration professional diploma program. Barbara is employed now at a local chiropractic centre. She is thrilled to be employed and said Second Career was "an opportunity of a lifetime." Let me tell him about

Robert, a 45-year-old London area general labourer. He was laid off from a job he had with a painting company in London. Through Second Career—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A question to the Minister of Finance: Some of the lowest-paid workers at the Woodbine Racetrack have been locked out and told to stay home. The company made an offer on Saturday at about 1:30 a.m., said it was the final offer, and then told the workers that if they didn't accept immediately, they would be locked out at 6 a.m.

Minister, provincially owned OLG is responsible for racing and gaming operations in Ontario. Will the minister get on the phone immediately with the Woodbine Entertainment Group and tell them that this kind of bullying has no place in industrial relations in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I understand that a final offer vote is being conducted today, so it would be inappropriate for any of us to make any comment about that vote. Let's allow that vote to take place, which is happening today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, most of these locked-out employees earn about \$15 an hour or less, and some of them have been there for 25 years. Almost all of these employees work in the kitchen or as servers.

Woodbine recently got approval for 1,000 new slot machines and was very generous with your party, making the maximum donation in the two current by-elections.

Will the minister ask Woodbine Entertainment Group, who clearly like you, to stop bullying these loyal workers and make amends to them by paying their wages for the time they have been locked out?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: As I mentioned in the first question, there is a vote being conducted today, and it would be inappropriate for me to make comment on those proceedings. What I can say is that our mediators have been there assisting the parties all along, and they will continue to do so. We all know that a collective agreement, one reached by the parties, is the most stable, most productive agreement that we can have. We will continue to assist those parties with our mediation team at the Ministry of Labour.

But again, today there is a final vote offer that is being conducted. We will allow that to take place, and I can't comment further.

CONDOMINIUM RESERVE FUNDS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: My question is for the Minister of Consumer Services. Minister, in my riding of Mississauga-Brampton South there are many condominium buildings. As such, my office receives inquiries from condo owners on various issues.

As you may know, condo buildings set aside a reserve fund that is used to pay for major repairs and replacements in the building. The Condominium Act, 1998, introduced a 10-year deadline for condominiums Registered before May 2001 to meet a reserve fund requirement. As the deadline approaches, some buildings have not been able to meet their reserve fund requirements. Minister, what can we offer condos that will not be able to meet the deadline?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you to the member from Mississauga-Brampton South for her continued advocacy when it comes to condominiums.

I am delighted to tell the member and also the House that our government is giving condo corporations and owners more breathing room when it comes to the reserve fund requirements. This means that condominium corporations registered before 2001 will have an additional five years to ensure that their reserve funds are adequately funded. We're working with our sector partners. The government has determined that it will extend the reserve fund from the deadline of 10 years to 15 years, and this change will come into effect on July 1, 2010.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm glad to hear that the ministry is providing an extension to condominium boards to meet their reserve fund needs. In the context of the current economic climate, many sectors have been unable to reach their financial goals. Giving the boards an extension will allow them to adjust their strategies to raise the funds and meet their reserve fund requirements.

Can the minister tell this House what the extension means for condo owners, many of whom may fear that there will be an increase in the maintenance fees to meet the reserve fund requirement within the new deadline?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thanks again to the member. This is really a significant step to respond to the needs of condominium boards. It will give them increased budget flexibility while protecting the essential rights of consumers. That's what this ministry is all about.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to recognize Wojciech Dzięgiel, the vice-consul for the Republic of Poland, and his wife, Agnieszka, who are visiting us here today in the Ontario Legislature. Welcome.

Also, today there's a celebration occurring here at the Legislature for epilepsy awareness. I will be making a statement on that. I'd like to welcome Margaret Maye and Gary Neumann, who are here with us in the Legislature, as well as Mary Secco from London and Dianne McKenzie from my riding of Durham. Welcome. I'd encourage all members to attend the education and awareness session they're having in room 228.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BECKY KELLAR

Mr. Toby Barrett: Congratulations to our Canadian Olympians. From Alexandre Bilodeau's gold medal at the outset to the overtime period between Canada and the US, we have so much to feel good about—and of course, the third straight Olympic gold medal win for our women's hockey team. Haldimand-Norfolk is especially proud, as Hagersville native Becky Kellar is the senior veteran on the team and is a member of the three-peat Canadian club as one of a handful of players who have represented Canada at all four Olympics since women's hockey debuted in 1998.

Kellar was just fresh out of university when Canada lost to the US 3-1 in the gold medal game in Nagano. Four years later, on the Americans' home soil in Salt Lake City, Kellar was instrumental in the 3-2 gold medal win. In Turin, Kellar and her teammates celebrated a 4-1 win over Sweden to win their second straight Olympic gold medal in 2006.

Recently, it was touching to see Becky's children join her on the ice after the game. Sadly for Kellar fans, this will be her last Olympics.

Congratulations to Becky Kellar. I look forward to seeing those players she has inspired fill her skates on Olympic ice someday.

Thank you to all the athletes for helping us believe in the Olympic spirit once again.

FRYDERYK CHOPIN

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm reading this statement on behalf of my colleague Cheri DiNovo from Parkdale-High Park. I want to welcome the vice-consul of Poland, Mr. Dzięgiel, and many other members of the Polish community as I read this statement.

On March 1, 1810, the great composer Fryderyk Chopin was born to a Polish mother and a French father. Chopin was a child prodigy by the time he was six. Born near Warsaw, Chopin was inspired by Poland's lore and folk tunes. He lived in Poland until he was 19, when he was forced to flee after the failed uprising of 1830 against the Russian occupiers. Having settled in France, he soon became famous all over Europe as a distinguished composer, piano virtuoso and leading representative of the music of the Romantic period.

Chopin's music is rare, unique and tinged with a remarkable sense of beauty. He was an innovator whose work influenced composers of the French, German and Russian schools, and stimulated radical changes of the 20th-century sound language. He is a legend whose music enjoys universal appeal.

The great Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid describes Chopin as "Warsawer by birth, Pole by heart and world citizen by his talent."

In recognition of Chopin's 200th birthday, Poland's Parliament has formally declared 2010 to be the year of

Fryderyk Chopin. Chopin's birth is also being celebrated all over the world. Here in Canada, we celebrate his immortal music. The Canadian Chopin Festival 2010 continues at Jean Paul II Polish Cultural Centre, in Mississauga, Ontario, until March 7.

It's with great honour that we remember the legacy of Polish composer Fryderyk Chopin. Happy birthday, Mr. Chopin.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Ontario produces more cars than any other state or province in North America. In fact, we're a world leader, and our government is working with our auto industry partners to keep this a strong sector.

Approximately 400,000 Ontarians are employed in the auto industry. Now we can add 757 more to that number. Our government is supporting the next phase of the transformation of the Ford Essex engine plant in Windsor, which is expected to create and retain up to 757 new jobs over the next five years.

The province will contribute up to \$81.2 million towards the project, building on a \$17-million provincial investment announced in March 2008. That helped reopen the plant. Ford plans to invest up to \$736.4 million. That's almost a billion dollars right here in Ontario.

Our investment has allowed this plant to stay open and provide more jobs for Ontarians. We will continue to work with our auto sector partners to create jobs and protect the livelihoods of Ontarians working in this industry.

We know that we need to be part of a solution to help the Ontario auto industry through these difficult economic times. These 750 jobs are proof that our strategy is working.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr. Norm Miller: On October 22, 2009, the McGuinty government announced its record-shattering \$24.7-billion deficit, larger than the deficits of every other provincial and territorial government combined. Every hour, 24 hours a day, the McGuinty government spends \$2.8 million more than it receives in revenue. At this current rate of spending, Dalton McGuinty is on course to double Ontario's debt by 2012-13.

For seven days, more than 140 groups made presentations to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Dozens more made written submissions. The issue of deficit and debt reduction was a common theme among presenters at the pre-budget consultations this year. These groups included the Certified Management Accountants of Ontario, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Warren Jestin of Scotiabank, and Canadian Independent Federation of Business, among others.

Gerry Macartney, CEO of the London Chamber of Commerce, commented, "Our members are chiefly concerned about the size of the debt, the size of the

deficit and the lack of an articulated plan to eliminate that deficit."

A significant number of presenters commented on the broad themes of deficit reduction through strategic spending, job creation and economic growth via sound tax policies and thwarting excessive red tape and regulation.

The time has come for Dalton McGuinty to heed this advice and take action to implement meaningful policy changes that will propel Ontario from worst to first.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Our government has made significant strides in health care over the past six years. One of our key priorities is investing in our hospitals. Since 2003, we've increased hospital funding by 42%, raising it to \$15.5 billion a year. We've also invested in reducing wait times in key surgeries. For example, the wait times for cancer surgeries have dropped by 17 days.

We know how important it is that Ontarians have access to primary care in their communities. That's why, for the first time in 40 years, throughout Canada we've opened a new medical school in northern Ontario. We've also increased medical school spaces and created family health teams to provide more complete local health care. As a result of those measures, almost 900,000 more Ontarians now have access to a family doctor. On top of that, we've hired 10,000 nurses and we're moving forward with nurse practitioner clinics to provide more points of access for quality care.

It is clear that our government has strengthened our public health care system considerably over the past six years. We've come a long way, and we're committed to making even more progress in the future.

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EPILEPSY AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. John O'Toole: First of all, I seek unanimous consent from all members to wear a purple ribbon with respect to the epilepsy purple ribbon campaign.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

March is Epilepsy Awareness Month. I would like to remind the House again of the epilepsy information session being held today in room 228 until 6 p.m.

Up to two in 100 students in Ontario have epilepsy and other neurological disorders. In Ontario alone there are 120,000 people with epilepsy. That's more than the number of people with multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's disease and muscular dystrophy combined.

Living with epilepsy brings many challenges. We hope you will join us on Purple Day, March 26, in showing your support by wearing something purple.

Dianne McKenzie, executive director of Epilepsy Durham, urges the House to learn more about how we can provide a more accommodating environment that gives people with epilepsy encouragement and hope.

Dianne also informs me that Durham region receives no core funding from the province or from the United Way. I would ask the House to lend its support so that individuals in your community living with epilepsy know that they are not alone or ignored.

In a special way, I ask the Minister of Community and Social Services to ensure that those with epilepsy are not ignored when they're applying for ODSP. Try to support persons with special needs in your community, whoever they are. This is Epilepsy Awareness Month. Work with us, please.

TAXATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: Our government has introduced a tax reform package that does three important things for our province.

First of all, it cuts taxes for Ontarians. For example, 93% of Ontarians will receive a tax cut and 90,000 low-income earners will be removed from the tax rolls altogether. In addition to that, Ontarians will receive sales tax credits and property tax credits, and we have enhanced the Ontario senior homeowners' property tax grant.

Secondly, this tax package cuts taxes for businesses, reducing the corporate income tax rate and the small business rate and eliminating the capital tax. These reforms will make Ontario businesses stronger and more competitive.

Thirdly, these tax reforms will create almost 600,000 new jobs over the next 10 years. Ultimately, more jobs and strong businesses mean that we're able to support vital services, such as hospitals and schools, that we all rely on and that improve the quality of life for the people in our province.

These tax reforms are the foundation we need for a more prosperous Ontario and a brighter future for our children. Now is exactly the right time for a modern tax system that benefits Ontarians and businesses alike.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Challenging economic times require governments to act. That's what our government is doing when it comes to creating jobs for Ontario citizens.

We're investing \$34 billion over the next two years that's going to stimulate economic growth and help Ontario families. That includes an investment of \$32.5 billion for the infrastructure we know is really needed, such as roads, public transit, energy and the retrofit for our public schools. That investment is expected to create and support more than 300,000 jobs for Ontarians.

On top of that, we're helping over 26,000 unemployed Ontarians to go back to school to train for a second career. This program prepares these workers to get back into the workforce.

Our green energy program is going to create 50,000 new Ontario jobs, producing clean energy like wind

turbines and solar panels. Clean energy is an important economic opportunity for our province, and that's going to continue to grow and grow in the years to come.

These are just a few examples of how this government continues to move forward with a strong plan that helps families and businesses affected by the global economic crisis. We're taking action to make sure that Ontario is stronger, more competitive and has a prosperous future. We know that Ontarians support us as we continue to move forward in this regard. On the heels of the great news about the GDP in the last quarter of last year, I think this is exactly the strategy that this province needs.

EPILEPSY AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Helena Jaczek: As we've already heard, today is epilepsy awareness day in Queen's Park, and March is in fact Epilepsy Awareness Month in Canada.

Many people mistakenly believe epilepsy is a disease or a psychological disorder. In fact, epilepsy is a neurological disorder. It causes seizures as a result of sudden bursts of electrical energy in the brain. In about 60% to 75% of cases there is no known cause of why people develop this disorder. It is estimated that between 120,000 and 245,000 people in Ontario live with a seizure disorder, and while there are treatments, there is no known cure.

What can help is raising awareness about epilepsy and the needs of those who live with it. This month, and especially on international epilepsy awareness day on March 26, I hope that all of the members of this Legislature will join that effort and wear a purple ribbon to help raise awareness.

I would like to thank all of the hard-working, dedicated and caring volunteers, advocates and medical professionals who work with Ontarians who suffer from epilepsy. I applaud their efforts and encourage anyone wanting more information on epilepsy to visit the website of Epilepsy Ontario.

PETITIONS

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to read my petition from constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government is conducting a review of the province's underserved area program," often referred to as UAP, "that may result in numerous communities across rural and small-town Ontario losing financial incentives to recruit and retain much-needed doctors; and

"Whereas financial incentives to attract and keep doctors are essential to providing quality front-line health care services, particularly in small communities; and

"Whereas people across Ontario have been forced to pay Dalton McGuinty's now-forgotten health tax since

2004, expecting health care services to be improved rather than cut; and

"Whereas taxpayers deserve good value for their hard-earned money that goes into health care, unlike the wasteful and abusive spending under the McGuinty Liberals' watch at eHealth Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government not reduce or eliminate financial incentives rural communities and small towns need" to attract and retain much-needed doctors.

I'm pleased to sign and support this in support of my community in Durham.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has taken an important step in its decision to implement full-day kindergarten; and

"Whereas children between the ages of six and 12 years continue to suffer from a lack of accessible, quality programs; and

"Whereas unlike youth and children in their early years, more than one million children six to 12 years old across Ontario are being left behind because of a lack of dedicated funding for accessible, quality middle childhood programs; and

"Whereas failure to increase middle childhood programming threatens a child's safety, education, and social development as they prepare to face the challenges of the approaching teen years; and

"Whereas implementing effective middle childhood programs increases self-esteem, improves school performance, and enhances quality of life for both children and their families; and

"Whereas Charles Pascal, in his 2009 report *With Our Best Future in Mind*, provides a framework and strategy for implementing a provincial structure for middle childhood programs across Ontario; and

"Whereas investing in middle childhood programs is part of Ontario's economic stimulus strategy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest now in children six to 12 years old across Ontario and implement the recommendations made in the *With Our Best Future in Mind* report."

I'm in agreement and would sign my signature thereto and send it down with page Max.

POWER PLANT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition signed by some residents from east Oakville that says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario ... has selected a location for a gas-fired electrical generating power station within three kilometres of 16 schools and more than 11,000 homes; and

"Whereas the Oakville-Clarkson airshed is already one of the most polluted in Canada; and

"Whereas no independent environmental assessment has been completed for this proposed building location; and

"Whereas Ontario has experienced a significant reduction in demand for electrical power; and

"Whereas a recent accident at a power plant in Connecticut demonstrated the dangers that nearby residents face;

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"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to immediately rescind the existing plan to build a power plant at or near the current planned location on lands owned by the Ford Motor Co. on Royal Windsor Drive in Oakville and initiate a complete review of area power needs and potential building sites, including environmental assessments and a realistic assessment of required danger zone buffer areas."

I agree with this and will sign it.

TAXATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in the health tax, the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas at the pumps; home heating oil and electricity; postage stamps; haircuts; dry cleaning; home renovations; real estate transactions; veterinary care; and arena ice and soccer field rentals;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes, once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I affix my name in full support.

CLAYTON BROWN PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a petition here signed by a number of parents and various citizens from the town of Hearst, and it reads as follows:

"English-language residents and students are in a minority in Hearst;

"Clayton Brown Public School is currently one of the last remaining institutions in the community where English culture and language is predominant;

"Elementary students at this school have the opportunity to benefit from the atmosphere and secondary students should be provided the same benefit; and

"The conversion of Clayton Brown Public School to a JK-to-12 would provide secondary students with an opportunity to enjoy the climate, as well as providing them with the chance to learn in an environment where administrative control of the buildings lies with their own principal;

"This would guarantee their organization's decision would be made with their best interests at heart."

I sign the petition and submit it to my friend Christopher.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It has been signed by a number of people in my riding. I especially want to recognize Bart Wassmansdorf and Prakash Bansod of Meadowvale, wish a happy 70th birthday to Hans Hoepler of Lisgar and thank them all for signing the petition. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the ongoing capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm very pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Brady to carry it for me.

POWER PLANT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the province of Ontario, through the Ontario Energy Board, has selected a location for a gas-fired electrical generating power station within three kilometres of 16 schools and more than 11,000 homes; and

"Whereas the Oakville-Clarkson airshed is already one of the most polluted in Canada; and

"Whereas no independent environmental assessment has been completed for this proposed building location; and

"Whereas Ontario has experienced a significant reduction in demand for electrical power; and

"Whereas a recent accident at a power plant in Connecticut demonstrated the dangers that nearby residents face;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to immediately rescind the existing plan to build a power plant at or near the current planned location on lands owned by the Ford Motor Co. on Royal Windsor Drive in Oakville and initiate a complete review of area power needs and potential building sites, including environmental assessments and a realistic assessment of required danger zone buffer areas."

I'm pleased to sign this petition and pass it to page Colin to take to the table.

TAXATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I've had this petition sent in from individuals in Campbellford and Warkworth, and it reads:

"Whereas the hard-working residents of Ontario do not want the new harmonized sales tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, house sales over \$400,000, fast food under \$4, electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than \$30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snow-plowing, air-conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes and that the McGuinty Liberal government not bring into effect the harmonized sales tax/value-added tax/blended sales tax/any combination of the provincial retail sales tax with the GST for Ontario consumers."

I affix my name in full support.

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm going to be reading one here from the member from Sarnia-Lambton, who is urging me to read this petition. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services" that families and

businesses buy and use every day. Just a few examples are as follows—a long list: “coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements,” and the list goes on.

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn’t raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the” dreaded “health tax, which costs up to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That Dalton McGuinty’s government wake up to Ontario’s current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario’s hard-working families and businesses.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this and hand it to Brady, one of the new pages here.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: I’d like to present a petition as well. This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax,” at a time when families can ill afford it, and businesses can least afford it as well;

“Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty’s new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day.” A few examples—just a few—include “gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes and funeral arrangements;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn’t raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the” dreaded “health tax, which costs upwards of \$600 to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario’s current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario’s hard-working families and businesses.”

I agree with this petition and I’ll affix my name to it and send it with Max.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

IPPERWASH PROVINCIAL PARK

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognizes the May 2009 Ipperwash Provincial Park transfer process agreement between the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Ontario, and endorses

the proposed transfer of the land and revocation of the part of Ontario regulation 316/07 that sets aside the area of Ipperwash Provincial Park as a provincial park of Ontario, pursuant to subsection 9(4) of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ms. Jeffrey has moved government notice of motion number 173. Debate?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I appreciate the chance to address the Legislature today and speak to this historic motion. I’m also pleased to be joined on this important occasion by my colleagues the members from Peterborough and Sarnia-Kent-Lambton. Each of their contributions should be recognized today, and I’m pleased they are here to speak to the motion.

Today we are here to debate a unique motion of historical importance. I recognize that this is an extraordinary measure and would like to share with the members of this Legislature how this motion came to be before us today. The release of the report of the Ipperwash inquiry in May 2007 was a significant milestone. This report has served as the road map for the McGuinty government partnership with First Nations and Metis to improve the quality of life for aboriginal communities in Ontario.

Today we are looking to take another important step forward. One of the 100 recommendations of the report of the Ipperwash inquiry was that the province of Ontario transfer Ipperwash Provincial Park to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. In December 2007, our Premier announced that the province intended to make that transfer. Since that time, we have been working hard to deliver on that commitment. In May 2009, then Minister of Aboriginal Affairs Brad Duguid signed a transfer agreement with Chief Elizabeth Cloud. That agreement set out the next steps for the transfer of the parkland.

As a ministry, we’ve co-operated with Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, local communities and the federal government to make sure that the transfer is executed properly. At the same time, I believe we have been able to build the strong relationship necessary to move forward. I want to recognize and acknowledge all the hard work many dedicated public servants have done to get us to this point. I also want to acknowledge the many Ontario Parks staff who have worked at Ipperwash park over the years.

As the members also know, the deregulation of the park is an essential first step in the process of transferring parkland. Ontario’s parks are established by regulation under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act. Today we are moving to rescind the park boundary by regulation, in order to remove the provincial park designation. In order to rescind the park boundary, we need to remove Ipperwash Provincial Park from the schedule for the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act by changing an associated regulation. This action will allow us to transfer the land to the government of Canada for the use and benefit of the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation.

It is important to note that it is the First Nation's desire to have the land transferred to Canada under the addition to reserve policy. The federal government has the constitutional authority to transfer land to an existing reserve; the provincial government does not.

Ipperwash Provincial Park was the fourth provincial park to be established in Ontario's park system. The park itself covers a total area of about 56 hectares. One provision of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act is that the disposition of an area that is 1% of the protected area or 50 hectares or more must be reported to the Legislative Assembly, tabled and endorsed by the assembly. Our proposal for Ipperwash falls under that provision. That is the purpose of the government's motion here today.

The members may be interested to know that this is the first time that my ministry has ever made this kind of request since the act came into effect in 2007. The act provides that this matter come before the Legislature because the intent of the legislation was to ensure that it was not easy to deregulate a park. But there is precedent for making changes of this nature.

Under previous parks and protected areas legislation, parks have been deregulated for transfer to Canada for the benefit of First Nations. Such was the case for Sand Point First Nation, near the community of Nipigon. As well, parkland was deregulated to benefit the Big Grassy and Onigaming First Nation on the east side of Lake of the Woods.

That being said, however, the deregulation of a park is not a decision that we take lightly. The case of Ipperwash is extraordinary. We are doing our part to help right an historic wrong. At the end of this process, the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation will be able to use the property to benefit from the economic development opportunities, employment and revenue generation. Our goal is to help the community thrive and continue to improve the local quality of life. My ministry will continue to provide advice and work with the First Nation to help the community develop long-term planning goals for Ipperwash park.

I should also point out that this transfer is another step in the healing process and will ultimately contribute to a better quality of life for the First Nation. The government remains committed to making this a reality.

Economic development opportunities for the First Nation will also, over the long term, contribute to the local economy and to area municipalities. Along with the economic benefits, there will be chances for relationship building and co-operation between aboriginal, non-aboriginal people and the related communities.

Ontario is the home to parks that are world-renowned, and Ipperwash Park is one of those jewels in one of the world's biggest and best parks systems. Our parks will continue to enjoy over 10 million visits each and every year, and these Ontario landmarks will continue to provide amazing recreational opportunities while also protecting our significant natural and cultural heritage.

Our parks are an even more important feature this year as we mark the International Year of Biodiversity.

Deregulating Ipperwash park is the right thing to do for the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. It's the right thing to do as a province in our efforts to contribute to the necessary healing, reconciliation, and ultimately to building a better future for all Ontarians.

I urge the members of this Legislature to support this important proposal.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I rise to speak on behalf of the official opposition to today's government resolution that reads as follows: "That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognizes the May 2009 Ipperwash Provincial Park transfer process agreement between the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Ontario, and endorses the proposed transfer of the land and revocation of the part of Ontario regulation 316/07 that sets aside the area of Ipperwash Provincial Park as a provincial park of Ontario, pursuant to subsection 9(4) of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006."

This motion was first tabled in this House last week. In fact, it first appeared in our orders and notices last Thursday. Given the fact that our caucus meets on Tuesdays, we have not had the opportunity to discuss it, nor to be formally briefed on it by ministry staff. One would have thought that the government would have been interested and willing to give all parties in this House these basic legislative courtesies.

Amongst other responsibilities, I serve as our party's critic to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. I am honoured to have this role. To begin, I understand that this motion is required to carry out the government's plan to transfer Ipperwash Provincial Park to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point. Our party is not going to challenge or take issue with this specific motion today, or more broadly, the government's decision to transfer the park in this instance. The motion is simply the logical extension of a policy that the government has already announced. In this case, it was reported in the National Post in December 2007, based on an announcement by the then-aboriginal affairs minister, Michael Bryant. Further, we understand that this motion is a technical requirement set out in subsection 9(4) of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006.

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On this side of the House, we recognize that each outstanding aboriginal land claim is unique and that each set of circumstances is unique. Therefore, the approach of government must take this into account, considering and evaluating each claim on its own individual merits. I want to stress this point to ensure that it is clearly understood by all in this House.

As we seek principled solutions to these issues, of course, we must strive for fairness to all concerned while articulating a clear and accurate representation of history. No one, I submit, would reasonably dispute this point.

Further, the province must work co-operatively and productively with affected First Nations as well as the government of Canada, respecting its legitimate jurisdiction, to achieve lasting solutions.

With so many considerations and with such complexity of the issues involved, the pace at which progress is made can often be slow—in some cases, exceedingly slow. With respect to the particular issues Commissioner Linden outlined in the Ipperwash inquiry in his report, the government has a great deal of work to do. My colleague the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka pointed out in his remarks in June of last year that at that time most of the 100 recommendations in Justice Linden's report had yet to be acted upon.

In this instance, having made the announcement in December 2007 that Ipperwash would be transferred, the government took until today, more than 26 months later, for this motion to come forward. This is not meant as a criticism, but merely as a factual observation, for we know that patience in these matters is a virtue, as are tolerance, honesty and understanding.

The government has been clear in its intention to proceed with the transfer. The process, I think we would all agree, must be transparent and must be done right. Upon learning of the government's intention to proceed today with this motion, I was skeptical, I think quite justifiably, of its timing and, by extension, of its motives. This government has demonstrated a pattern of raising diversionary issues as a way to deflect attention from its lackadaisical response to our economic challenges. On its one apparently significant so-called emergency debate on the economy back in 2008, the government still has not yet bothered to bring it to a vote. In fact, it appears they have forgotten about that so-called emergency debate.

To be clear, I understand that the government's motion today is necessary in order to carry out its policy with respect to the transfer of Ipperwash. We don't dispute that today. It is, however, highly unfortunate that this government has taken such an irresponsible course with the province's finances, such that we find ourselves with a nearly \$25-billion deficit without the means to respond to the social and economic challenges facing Ontario's aboriginal communities. For example, the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point want to make a significant contribution to Ontario's economy and society. They have done so in the past, and will do even more in the future with the right support from the government of Ontario.

I want to mention a few facts about this community. It has, I understand, 1,000 members who live on the reserve and another 900 who live off-reserve. It is part of a much larger nation of nearly 78,000 throughout North America. No doubt, they have felt the economic downturn as acutely as anyone. Without a doubt, in many cases our First Nations peoples have endured some of the worst poverty in the province, and the current economic downturn serves only to worsen their circumstances.

Our First Nations are saying that the best way to improve their lives is to create significant and lasting

economic opportunities in which they can participate. They need jobs, they need better health care services, they need improved education opportunities. We support those things, and we believe they should be the government's focus.

To conclude, the official opposition will not be proposing amendments to this resolution, nor will we impede its passage in this House today. We extend our best wishes to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and look forward to a shared future of hope and opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm going to take some time on this, because I think a few things need to be said in regard to the Ipperwash inquiry and what came of it.

First of all, I want to say up front that obviously we're going to support the motion. It was one of the recommendations that came out of the Ipperwash inquiry and, as such, I think has the support of all the parties in this Legislature—I'd be very surprised to see anybody vote against it—and certainly has the support of First Nations as one of the things that needs to be done in order to deal with the fallout from what happened, unfortunately, at Ipperwash park. I want to spend my time and talk about what this means and what still needs to be done, and that will be the thrust of what I have to say today.

First of all, as I say, we're in support. We think this is a good step forward. It is something that was recommended in the Ipperwash inquiry, as I said, but I think a couple of questions have to be asked.

First, I was really surprised when I got a copy of this motion on Thursday. I decided to call Chief Angus Toulouse and Chief Cloud and Murray Klippenstein, who is the lawyer who acted on behalf of the George family, expecting to get some feedback from them that they knew about this and what their comments were, because I knew they were going to be in favour. I just wanted to know: Was there anything I should know about it that I was missing? Nobody knew about it.

I thought, "Isn't that weird?" Isn't it strange that the very people the government is trying to speak to didn't even know this was being brought to the Legislature? I thought, "Either I'm not reading this motion right and there's something in there that I've missed and that they must be trying to sneak through, or there's a communications problem within the government." Or there might be a third reason: This is more of the same that we've seen from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, where he's looking for things to say about First Nations that are positive and being seen as doing positive things while not doing a heck of a lot. I think it falls into the last category, with all respect to my good friend Madam Jeffrey on the other side, who's the Minister of Natural Resources.

You have to ask yourself—this is a good recommendation, but there are a few things that have to go with it—if we deregulate the park, as will be done as a result of this motion, where is the federal government when it comes to creation of the reserve land? I think that's a

really fair question; that's the thing we need to know. Has the provincial government engaged in discussions with the federal government to make sure that, once that part of Ipperwash Provincial Park is deregulated and allowed to become a reserve again, has the discussion happened with the federal government?

It was a little bit telling today, when the minister was being asked in scrums after question period, that those conversations have yet to take place in a meaningful way. I would imagine there must have been some discussion, but there hasn't been any commitment from the federal government and any kind of push from the provincial government to get the government on the federal side to move on this.

The other part of it is, once it's deregulated, who is going to deal with the cleanup costs at the old military base? That's a pretty simple question. There are some environmental issues on the old military base that is part of these lands. What commitment do we have from the federal government that they will actually take the responsibility for footing the bill when it comes to doing the cleanup?

I have some experience with the federal government in dealing with cleanups, because we had the old radar bases—the DEW line bases—that were basically in my riding. We had radar bases at Moosonee, Fort Albany and Winisk, and in Howard's riding up at Fort Severn and various points where they had repeaters. It was a whole environmental disaster having to do with the equipment the American and Canadian military left on those bases when they withdrew and shut down the radar bases on the James Bay coast. Here's what happened. We were trying to get it cleaned up, because the First Nations had these eyesores inside their communities, and the first one to come up for cleanup, other than Moosonee, was Fort Albany. I remember having a discussion then—I think Mr. Ouellette was the minister on the Conservative side of the House, if I remember correctly. We were having discussions with the minister and the ministry, and we finally decided as a province and said, "If we wait for the federal government to foot the bill to clean up Fort Albany, we're going to wait a long time and it's still going to be an environmental disaster." The government of the day said, "Listen, clean the site and send the bill to the federal government." What that did was force the federal government to the table to deal not only with the cost of the Fort Albany cleanup, but it also forced the federal government to come to the table and engage in discussions with the province about how we were going to clean up the other sites, because there were other sites to be cleaned up.

It was a bit of a risk on the part of the province, because the feds could have said, "You guys went ahead without our authorization, so you're stuck with the bill." But we recognized, on the provincial side, that if we waited for the feds to do anything, we'd be waiting for a long time. As it relates to Ipperwash Provincial Park, I think we need to be prepared to move on the cleanup in some kind of way that forces the feds to the table, even if

that means we have to start doing some of that ourselves. But again, there's no indication, as a result of this particular motion, who's going to deal with the cleanup at the Ipperwash military base that has been closed for some time.

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The other issue is that of treaty rights in regard to how it affects this particular motion. There are discussions that have to ensue between the federal and provincial governments and the First Nations to deal with the treaty issues that fall out of this. Again, what commitment do we have from the provincial government that they're actually going to deal with that? But more importantly, where the heck is the federal government on this? I don't want to engage in a discussion—because I know the Liberals love it. Mr. McGuinty—any time that we can shift the responsibility to the feds, it's something they love to do. The point is, we need to put some pressure on the federal government. I would think, at the very least, we should have some kind of indication at this point today, prior to debate, where the federal government is on converting those lands to reserve, dealing with treaty rights and dealing with the cleanup on the old military base. If we at least knew the answers, then we could make some decisions here in Ontario about how we proceed once we deregulate that park in order to allow it to become a reserve land. What are we prepared to do, as a province, in order to make those things happen? Those are all questions that are not being answered.

Like I said, the whole issue of this coming up for debate today, on Monday, and the people who are most affected haven't been contacted, leads me to believe that this is more of a communications problem on their side, but more importantly, this is more of an opportunity for the government to say, "Look at all the great things we're doing when it comes to First Nations in this province." I just want to take this opportunity to say, well, this is a great thing, but what about all of the other recommendations that came out of the Ipperwash inquiry?

In 2007, the Honourable Sidney B. Linden, the commissioner, came out with his report. The report had a number of recommendations in it, and I just want to go through some of those recommendations that have yet to be acted on since 2007, and that are, I would argue, equally if not more important not only to the Kettle and Stony Point people but to all First Nations people in this province.

If you look at what has been recommended, there are a whole number of recommendations in the Ipperwash inquiry, the first being, "The Treaty Commission of Ontario should be established in a provincial statute as an independent agency reporting directly to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario." What that means, simply put, is that the Legislature should pass legislation that enacts a piece of law that allows a treaty commission to be set up and that that treaty commission report back, just as our Environmental Commissioner and other commissioners do, directly back to the Legislature. Has that been done? I haven't seen the legislation. I haven't seen a draft of the

legislation. I haven't even heard a rumour about the legislation. So one of the most important recommendations that the Ipperwash inquiry gave was the creation of this treaty commission, and nowhere is there any indication that the treaty commission is actually something the government is going to bring forward any time soon.

So why do you cherry-pick and decide to take this piece of the Ipperwash inquiry and not take the other? I think it's a question of commitment. I think the provincial government wants to be seen as being positive toward First Nations issues and wants to be able to communicate to the public through the media, "Look at the great things we're doing to take our responsibilities as a provincial government vis-à-vis our First Nations." But when it comes to actually taking concrete steps, the government is a little bit slower, if not missing in action.

The other recommendation that flows out of the treaty commission recommendation is, "The governments of Ontario, Canada, and First Nations should jointly select the head of the Treaty Commission of Ontario." Well, we haven't even got the legislation, so we know we haven't got to that. But there was an understanding and an acknowledgment on the part of the Ipperwash inquiry that the treaty commission, once established, should have a head and that head should be somebody that everybody agrees on—not just the federal or provincial governments appointing their friend or their political operative to be the head of the commission, but somebody that First Nations, the feds and the provincial government could live with.

It goes on to say, "The Treaty Commission of Ontario should be given a four-part, strategic mandate," and that mandate is that the Treaty Commission of Ontario "should be given the authority to assist governments and First Nations, independently and impartially, in developing and applying a wide range of tools and processes to clarify and settle issues in an expeditious and co-operative way."

We still have, after all of these years, a whole raft of unresolved treaties. Where are we at trying to get those resolved? It's certainly not to the advantage of First Nations that these treaties sit out there, yet to be negotiated and resolved, and I would argue that it's certainly not to the advantage of the provincial government, because the province doesn't benefit by having this in limbo. Certainly, the residents in the area don't gain by not having this resolved one way or another. The treaty commission was all about making sure that we're able to advance and expedite, in a way that would work for the First Nations, the crown and the public, a resolution to long-standing treaties, and we've yet to move on any of the recommendations that deal with that.

The other part of their four-part strategic plan was that "the Treaty Commission of Ontario should be given the mandate to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the land claims process in Ontario" and "establish and publish benchmarks for processing claims" and have "dispute resolution, binding as well as non-binding, when the benchmarks are not met."

Simply put, the commission, along with the others who are involved—First Nations and others—should be able to set a benchmark and say, "Treaty whatever of this particular piece of land is currently at this stage of the process. Let's set, as a benchmark, the following things that need—not the following things that need to happen, but by when we expect to have this resolved." So you say, "Okay, we'll give this a time frame of 16 months, 18 months or 24 months, and here are the things that need to happen within that time period to get their resolution. But if no resolution is sought, we have some mechanisms to resolve disputes." In some cases, they'd be binding arbitration and, in some cases, they would not be, depending on the circumstance. Why has that recommendation not been acted on? We've strictly dealt with, at this point, the issue of the Ipperwash park.

The third part of the Ipperwash inquiry in regard to the benchmarks was that "the Treaty Commission of Ontario should be given the mandate to make the claims process accountable and transparent to all Ontarians." I think, man, is that important for everybody—for First Nations and non-First Nations people. We need to have a transparency of how this works, what it means, how it's going to be resolved in the end and what the resolution should be.

First Nations people obviously need to know because unlike our communities, they operate very differently, in the sense that decisions aren't made at the band council unless the community has said, "Yes, you can go ahead and do it." It's not like a municipality. In a municipal structure, mayor and council make a decision. They have a vote at the table, and we trust that our elected officials will make the right decision. If we don't like it, every four years we turf them out and we get new ones.

In the aboriginal community, we've imposed on them a European method of governing where we have this thing called a band council. A band council works something like a municipality but, to First Nations, it's very alien to the way they actually do business, because the way that they've traditionally done business and the way they still do is that there has to be some discussion with the community and sufficient time for people to get their heads around it. Then families—because it is family politics on reserve big time—and individuals have to come to terms with what is being proposed by the leaders of the community or whoever it might be—the provincial or federal governments—and then a decision is made at the community level.

The process there is, you need to make sure that the community has an opportunity to have its say. That's why transparency and recommendation number 3 of transparency are so important: because First Nations, by tradition, operate very differently from us. I can give you examples of De Beers. When De Beers negotiated their impact benefit agreement with the community of Attawapiskat, the community that's closest to the mine and most affected, it took three to four years by the time the discussion completed its process in the community and people came to terms with the very issues around

environment, compensation, employment and business opportunities, till finally there was a consensus in the community and a referendum was taken at 85% in favour of the agreement that De Beers had negotiated with the First Nation. It takes longer, but that's the way they do business. There has to be a community consensus for them to move forward.

Transparency for First Nations is important in the sense that it respects the cultural differences and the political differences about how they operate, but on the non-aboriginal side, it's just as important. Look at what's going in Caledonia. I'm not going to pronounce this, that or the other on Caledonia, but the issue is, clearly there needs to be a process where it is very transparent for those people who are affected by whatever decision is made, because they're the neighbours, they're the people living in proximity to the community where the decision is being made about whatever affects the First Nation. It's not that we need to have the approval of fellow citizens and adjoining communities—because sometimes approval may never be gained, or approval would be given—but the point is, it's not about getting approval; it's about making sure the public understands what this is all about. Also, what the provincial and federal governments are doing has to be transparent for people to have sufficient comfort and understanding to accept decisions that are made.

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The fourth point that was made on that recommendation is that the Treaty Commission of Ontario “should be given a broad mandate to undertake public education about treaties, treaty relationships, and land claims in Ontario.” The Treaty Commission of Ontario “should be given the specific authority to develop programs about treaty history designed to be part of the Ontario school curriculum.”

Is that important? Let me give you my story, because I think it's typical of what we see in this province. I was born in the city of Timmins, in proximity to many First Nations, where many First Nations people live within an urban setting in the city of Timmins. What did I learn about First Nations when I went to school? About that much. I learned that there were some wars between the Brits and the French, and that the French befriended the First Nations to a degree for their own economic reasons, not because they were magnanimous. The French figured out that it was better to have them on our side fighting the English than to be fighting the English and the French at the same time. Then I learned by way of watching Saturday morning matinees. Remember those old cowboy and Indian movies? That was my education as to what goes on when it comes to the reality of First Nations communities who lived in my backyard. And why? Because there was nothing in the school curriculum to tell me, a non-aboriginal, what the history of the First Nations was in this nation for the thousands of years before the Europeans came and how it related and how they interrelated with us, as far as culture, about economics, about social exchanges that happened between our two peoples over all of these years.

So I think this recommendation of having the treaty commission set some recommendations as to what should go into the school curriculum is key. Ontarians know very little about First Nations, and I know that from my experience growing up in the city of Timmins, where I didn't know a heck of a lot about First Nations until much later in life when I got to know a lot more as I became elected as a provincial member of Parliament. I've got to tell you, it was an eye-opener, and I still learn every day.

I've got to tell you this story, because I'm just thinking of it now. It's a bit of a humorous story, but I think it makes the point. A good friend of mine, Gilbert Cheechoo—some of you might have dealt with him before; he was an economic development officer at the time, and I believe he's now the coordinator for the package that was settled between Moose Cree and De Beers. I remember him telling me a story that is actually pretty typical and pretty funny. We were talking about this very issue, and he said, “What did you know about First Nations as you were growing up?” I said, “Not a lot. The only thing I learned was by watching Saturday morning matinees.” He said, “Oh, we used to love those too.” I said, “Really? Why would you kids in Moose Factory be watching a Saturday morning matinee about cowboys and Indians?” He said, “We played cowboys and Indians all the time.” I said, “Gee, I feel kind of bad, because I used to play the cowboy.” He said, “Well, so did I.” I said, “Why would you be the cowboy?” He said, “They were spaghetti westerns. Those were bad Indians.” What a sense of humour. But it says a lot about our First Nations, about forgive and forget and seeing us for what we are and our foibles and all. I pass that story on, because I always thought it was quite an amusing story, but very true.

So I just say this recommendation on the part of the commission to instill in the education system, by a change of curriculum, what are First Nations, who are they, what do they do, what are their values, what are their aspirations—I think is really important to insert in the curriculum all across Ontario, so that we as citizens become much more knowledgeable about what First Nations face, so that we can together try to find a solution. I think that's one of the key recommendations.

One of the other recommendations in the Ipperwash inquiry is, “The provincial and federal governments should commit sufficient resources to the TCO to enable it to achieve its objectives.” I think that goes without saying: If you don't fund it properly, it's not going to succeed. Why has that not been acted on?

“The provincial government should commit sufficient funds to enable the Ontario land claims process to resolve claims within an acceptable period.” Again, it's quite something if you were to put the Treaty Commission of Ontario together, but you also have to have a commitment to settle those land claims, which means there will be lands exchanging hands and there will also be some compensation, in some cases, associated with that. We need to be prepared for that and commit that we're prepared to do what's needed.

Another recommendation that has not been acted upon: "The provincial government and the TCO should work together to develop a business and financial plan for the Ontario land claims process. The objective would be to estimate the resources needed to resolve claims and to meet reasonable benchmarks during the land claims process," as said earlier.

"The federal government should co-operate fully with the provincial government and First Nations in Ontario to establish the Treaty Commission of Ontario and promote its effectiveness." On this point, I have to say a couple of things. The federal government should actually be involved in First Nations issues? What a novel thought. Wow. I'll say it here in the Legislature, and I'll say it outside, where I can be sued: If the Department of Indian Affairs and the federal government actually took on their responsibility to deal adequately with the needs, aspirations and issues faced by our First Nations, we would have made a pretty big step up to this point. Instead, what do we have in our communities? Howard Hampton, my good friend and colleague, represents a number—how many First Nations, 40-odd?

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's 55.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There are 55 First Nations in his riding. I have quite a few less than that. Mr. Gravelle has a few in his; Mr. Brown, Madame Gélinas. If you go into some of these reserves, especially reserves in the far north that Howard and I represent, you're looking at some pretty difficult situations. You have families of 25 people in a house, which is not uncommon. How do you, as a child of five or 10, study and excel in school if you're living in a house with 20 or 25 people, where you're actually "hot bedding" the beds? Some people sleep in the day and some people sleep at night because there are not enough beds in the house to go around. Why? Because neither the federal nor provincial government provides the funding needed to build an adequate amount of housing for those communities.

If there's one place in Canada where there is a huge rise in population, it's within First Nations communities. I think something like 60% of the residents on First Nations are under age 30. Think about that—60%. So we've had a huge increase in population in First Nations, but we have not kept up with the amount of housing that was originally given to those communities when they formed reserves some 30, 40 or 50 years ago.

Remember that reserves in our communities haven't been around for all that long. There were places where First Nations would congregate and would come at particular times of the year to do exchanges and trading with the Hudson's Bay Co. and others, but the actual reserve system didn't start until fairly recently. If you look on the James Bay coast, the communities of Fort Albany and Kashechewan were all formed within this last century. It wasn't until the 1930s, 1940s and, really, the 1950s, that they started building anything there. They signed the treaty in 1904 or 1905, somewhere around there, and then we forgot about them for 50 years and didn't do anything. Then 50 years later the federal gov-

ernment said, "Oh, let's build a couple of houses, put in some diesel generators, and maybe later on we'll get to the sewer system. They don't need stores to buy food or anything like that." So they created the reserves, and people came in because they said, "We recognize that the world is changing and our kids have to get to school." And what did they get? They got residential school.

So these communities are facing huge problems. In our communities where Howard and I are, the majority of people of my generation were raised in a residential school, and how that manifests itself back into the community is pretty difficult at best.

Where are the federal and provincial governments in responding to the need for housing in our communities? Why should it be allowed, at this time, that the provincial or federal governments would allow insufficient housing to be the norm on reserves across this province, especially in northern Ontario?

I remember bringing the media up to Attawapiskat about four or five years ago. I won't give the name, but in February there was a family where mom and dad and the younger children had moved into a tent in the backyard. Why did they do that? Because the two younger kids didn't have what they needed as far as peace of mind and quiet to study to excel in school; because mom and dad recognized that if they stayed in the house they were in, with the rest of their kids and the extended family, which was 20-some-odd people, the kids would not be able to study and excel in school and move forward with their lives. What did mom and dad do? They basically pitched a tent in the backyard.

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Here was the band council—it might have been Chief Theresa at that time; yes, Chief Theresa Hall, working hard, along with her band council, trying to get housing so people don't have to live in a tent in the middle of February in Attawapiskat, and federal and provincial governments not responding, the province saying, "It's a federal responsibility, so let's go talk to the feds," and the federal government saying, "Don't talk to us. We established a budget, and we're following it." As a result, the people in the community get mad at the chief and council, but the real culprits here are the senior levels of government that don't provide the funding.

I remember, and Mr. Hampton would remember this, when I was first elected in 1990 going on a tour into the James Bay. We went into a number of communities. I remember that we had gone to Attawapiskat and I believe to Fort Albany. There was no sewer system in 50% of the houses. The toilets were basically outside toilets, in the middle of winter. They were sort of porches; they attached to the houses. I remember seeing green garbage bags in the wintertime out on the curb every morning, and I asked, "What's that all about?" That was the bag that people defecated in, in their homes, on these make-shift toilets, and they would wrap them up, tie them up and put them on the road, and somebody would come by in the morning to pick it up.

We as a government—and Mr. Hampton at the time was Minister of Natural Resources—said, "Hang on.

There's something wrong here. This should not happen." Howard knew about it because he had been a member prior to that election. We went to the federal government, and the federal government said, "Oh, well, we'll get to it. Yeah, yeah, it's a priority." We said, as a government, "Listen, this is not right. These are Ontario citizens. People should at least be allowed to have a sewer system so they can go to the bathroom and take a shower and cook and clean do the things they've got to do."

Our government were the ones that funded the water and sewer in those communities. The water and sewer plants were put in at the time as a result of provincial dollars and embarrassing the federal government to jump in.

When they talk about getting the co-operation of the federal and provincial governments as a recommendation, my Lord, we would like to get their attention somewhat.

The other issue I want to talk about very briefly is the issue of policing. My good friend the critic for this issue, Mr. Kormos, has come up the coast with me a couple of times. You have situations where the police don't have the tools to do their job. They have a boat for rescue if a person should fall into the water, but it doesn't have a motor or paddle. Tell me what you're going to do with the boat. They ship the boat, but they don't ship the motor and the paddle because there is no money to buy them.

Police stations that are not police stations: They're houses converted into police stations where, tragically, we had two people die in a fire, in the jail in Kashechewan. My friend Mr. Kormos saw that particular jail at that time. In fact, I brought in the minister of the day, Mr. Kwinter, showed him this particular jail before it burned down and said, "Look what we've got. We've got a jail that's made of wood and a chain with a lock around the cells. There's an accident waiting to happen." I take no happiness in this, but unfortunately our predictions came through. What the community said, what the police said and what I said was the case: Eventually there would be a tragedy in one of these jails. In Kashechewan, we lost two people in a lock-up as a result of the fire in the jail because the jail guards couldn't open the doors in time to let them out when the fire came out. There were no smoke detectors in that jail. There were no fire detectors. There were no fire suppression systems. None of the code was being followed, and I would argue that still it's not being followed in—what, 60% or 70% of our communities, Howard?—I would say, on an average.

So we go and meet RoseAnne Archibald, who was deputy chief at the time, and other people from NAN. We went to meet with the minister, the Solicitor General, who was Rick Bartolucci. What did we get from him? "We're onside. We feel your pain. We're upset. We're with you. We want to fix that. Come and tell us when the federal government gives their 50%." Well, that's a stupid game. You know the federal government is not going to give their 50%. So I said, along with those present at that meeting, "Mr. Bartolucci, fund your 50%

and shame the federal government to do theirs, and in the end, if they don't, at the very least we're 50% closer to resolution of the problem.

Can I get some water here, page? Oh, there we go. My good friend Mr. Hampton comes to the rescue.

So when recommendation 12 is made about having some co-operation with the federal government, you can spend the debate just on that, but I just say that in a couple of examples it's pretty clear that is not happening.

Recommendation 13 is an interesting one: "The federal and provincial governments should work with" the treaty commission "and any equivalent federal agency to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and fairness of the federal and provincial land claims processes. Together, they should undertake the following:

"(a) Establish a common registry for federal and Ontario land claims."

Do you know there isn't one? Can you imagine that? We have no registry for federal and Ontario land claims. How are we supposed to deal with the issue of resolving them if we don't have some kind of registry to register which ones they are and prioritize which ones we're going to do first and in what order they're going to be done?

"(b) Establish a dispute resolution process that includes access to non-binding and binding resolution."

This is really important. It's part of a previous recommendation. We recognize that at times there's going to be some foot-dragging by the federal or provincial government or by the First Nations, and there needs to be a mechanism to have some sort of arbitration—in some cases it would have to be binding or non-binding—so we are able to move that forward. So in the event, let's say, that the federal government is dragging its heels as it normally does, we have a mechanism of binding arbitration to move that forward.

"(c) Use binding arbitration to determine the legal liabilities of the federal and provincial governments." What that means is fairly straightforward; I won't get into any discussion.

"(d) Develop common or consistent benchmarks and policies for federal and Ontario land claims," something that still doesn't exist.

Why is it that we have so many land claims that are yet unsettled? I would argue a lack of will on the part of the federal and provincial governments, not knowing and not really having a good handle on how many need to be settled, where they're at in the process and what needs to be done to settle them.

The last point, point (d), speaks to developing "common or consistent benchmarks and policies for federal and" provincial "land claims," because there are none. I think that's a recommendation that should be acted on. Unfortunately, it's not part of this motion today.

I spoke to this earlier, but recommendations 29 and 30 are around education and making sure that the Ministry of Education is part of the process of developing curriculum so that kids in our schools are able to learn

more about First Nations, for the reasons I mentioned earlier.

I just have to speak on recommendation 32, because it's one that originally was acted upon by the government, and then they decided not to act on it. Recommendation 32 says that the provincial government should create a Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs—that part has been done—and that the ministry should have a dedicated minister and its own deputy minister. We had our own minister, and for whatever reason—I will speak to that later—the Premier decided not to have a dedicated minister. Now we have the Attorney General who is also the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

I think that is a conflict of interest. I think that far too often the Attorney General finds himself—or herself, should it be a woman—in a position of having to both advocate the position of the provincial government in the court and be the defender of the First Nations' issues at the same court. In my view, you can't be the Attorney General and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs at the same time, because there are far too many times when you will be in conflict. I argue that is probably the same for the Ministry of Natural Resources. That is why we need a stand-alone minister. Unfortunately, the government decided to rescind on what was actually one of the recommendations that was followed through on.

Number 33: "The provincial government should create the appropriate cabinet structure to support the new ministry. The provincial government should consider establishing a new cabinet committee on aboriginal affairs and should consider including the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs on the priorities and planning board of cabinet," which has not been done.

If the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs was on P and P, I think that would be a step forward, because there are many unresolved issues that need to be dealt with that are not only important for First Nations but, I would argue, important for the economy of Ontario, and I speak of the Ring of Fire as an example.

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We have in northern Ontario, in my own riding, huge potential for mining that has now been identified. Those particular mines—at this point, we've got the De Beers diamond mine, but others that are potentially going to be coming online—will represent a huge economic stimulus for the province of Ontario, in the way of taxes that we get by way of royalties and income tax from these corporations, taxes we receive from the individuals working there and taxes we receive for the goods and services sold to these particular mining operations.

We know there's going to be a fair amount of economic activity taking place on traditional aboriginal treaty lands over the next number of years, so I think it is all the more important that we have the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs on P and P, and that we establish good land use planning processes so that First Nations feel comfortable about how development is going to take place, that it's consistent with their values and consistent with good ecological and environmental rules, so that we don't abuse that, and that at the end, they are able to

benefit from those projects by way of business opportunities, jobs and revenue sharing.

Until we do those things, I think it will be pretty difficult to allow those projects to go forward. I would imagine that if the government does not deal with these things adequately in the not-too-distant future, the Ring of Fire is going to be slowed in its development. If I was a First Nation and wasn't receiving any benefits from those particular economic activities, I think I would probably be willing to protest somewhat as well.

Imagine, if you will, if you lived in small-town Ontario and they were about to build a Ford plant right next to your community and they said, "We're not going to be hiring anybody from your town." Boy, oh boy, can you imagine what would happen in that small Ontario town? There would be people out manifesting; there would be people protesting. There would be people coming from whatever small town it was all the way to Queen's Park saying, "We want a stake in the economic activity that's going on with this car plant that's being built next to our community."

I'm not suggesting that the mining companies would say, "No, I will not hire First Nations people from this community." That's not what I'm suggesting. But unless we are prepared to identify ways to accommodate First Nations people in those communities to get jobs, they will be very limited in the jobs they can get.

For example, small-town Ontario gets a car plant, and they say, "We're looking for assemblers. There are no assemblers in this town, so we're going to go get assemblers from somewhere else." You can train assemblers. People in small-town Ontario would say, "We're prepared to do the training that's needed to be assemblers in the car plant." We need electricians, millwrights, mechanics—whatever—and there's training that might be needed to prepare these people for this economic activity. It's no different with a mine, and unless we're able to deal with those things effectively, First Nations will be shut out of those particular economic activities.

Those are a few of the things I wanted to put on the record. I just say again for the record that we will vote in favour of this motion because it deals with one part of the Ipperwash inquiry. But I want to remind you that the Ipperwash inquiry is a pretty large document and has quite a few recommendations. What we have now is that the government has cherry-picked one they can do that is not too difficult, but it is not moving on what I think are some of the key parts of the recommendations that were made.

I look forward to listening to other people in this debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the time today to address the Legislature on this very important matter; I remind members today that this building is located on the sacred lands of the Mississaugas of Port Credit.

I want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources for his part in moving this government forward in one of the

most important initiatives in aboriginal affairs. In my riding of Peterborough, I'm very proud to say that I have two First Nations communities: Hiawatha under the leadership of Chief Laurie Carr and Curve Lake under the leadership of Chief Keith Knott.

The transfer of the Ipperwash Provincial Park lands to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point is a reflection of this government's continuing commitment to the people of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and to all First Nations, Metis and Inuit in this great province. It's also representative of our commitment to building a stronger, more positive relationship with the aboriginal people in the province of Ontario. I'd like to acknowledge that the government of Canada is working very closely with us to facilitate this important transfer.

The park, as everyone in the House is aware, is a touchstone for aboriginal affairs in Ontario. On September 4, 1995, frustration over promises not kept resulted in a tragedy for the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point. One of the park's occupants lost his life. His name was Anthony O'Brien George, "Dudley" to his friends and family.

The loss was an unnecessary tragedy. We cannot undo it, but we can learn from it. Mr. George's death was our wake-up call. We knew we needed to build a new relationship between aboriginal people and the government of Ontario; we needed reconciliation and a new respect between us. This could only start with an official inquiry into how and why Anthony "Dudley" George died.

In November 2003, Premier Dalton McGuinty appointed Justice Sidney Linden to lead an independent public inquiry into the events of Ipperwash Provincial Park in 1995. The report of the Ipperwash inquiry was released on May 31, 2007. It quickly became our road map for working in partnership with the First Nations and Metis to improve the quality of life for aboriginal communities in this great province.

The report of the Ipperwash inquiry provided us with the guidance, not just to move forward, but to move forward in the right direction. The report discusses transferring Ipperwash Provincial Park to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. It outlines the potential benefits for the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point and for the surrounding non-aboriginal communities.

In December 2007, this government committed to transfer Ipperwash Provincial Park to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. A resolution table of both Ontario and First Nations representatives set out to work on an interim plan. This plan would outline how the park would be managed until the transfer of the land to the First Nation was complete.

In May 2009, the Ipperwash transfer process agreement was signed between the government of Ontario and the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. The agreement commits Ontario and the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation to a number of technical requirements, like environmental and archaeological assessments. It also ensures that the transfer of the park will go ahead as quickly as possible.

Maynard "Sam" George, brother of Anthony "Dudley" George, is one of the reasons we're here today and discussing the transfer of Ipperwash park. He is one of the reasons that Ontario has a stronger, more positive relationship with the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, and with aboriginal communities all across Ontario. Sam's questions following the death of his brother launched the Ipperwash inquiry. Sadly, he had only just begun to work with the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs when he fell ill. But thankfully, Sam was still with us when the Ipperwash park transfer agreement was signed last May. Almost nine months after his passing, his legacy is still with us today.

His contributions ensured that, together, we would find a way to move forward into a new era of healing, reconciliation, and peace with the First Nations in Ontario. The Ipperwash Inquiry Priorities and Action Committee was established. This committee brings forward First Nation leadership and representatives from the provincial and the federal governments.

Ontario's Minister of Aboriginal Affairs co-chairs the Ipperwash Inquiry Priorities and Action Committee along with Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse. This committee helped create the new relationship fund, which helps First Nations and Metis communities more effectively engage with the government and the private sector on important land, resource and other development initiatives.

The committee is now working on a resource benefit-sharing plan along with aboriginal communities; the potential of a Treaty Commission of Ontario with First Nations and Canada; and clarification of the crown's duty to consult and how Ontario can best work with First Nations to meet this duty.

Our government and aboriginal leaders across the province are setting priorities and tracking progress on Justice Linden's recommendations. We're taking important steps and we're moving forward.

I want to thank other ministers—I had the privilege of being parliamentary assistant for aboriginal affairs for some two and a half years—Ministers Bryant, Duguid and, for a very short period of time, Minister Bentley.

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I want to thank those First Nations communities that I had the opportunity to visit in the last two and a half years for their very warm welcome when I went into their communities to experience what they have to offer. As I said, we're taking important steps and we're moving forward together. Meegwetich.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Quite frankly, a First Nations issue is not easy by any stretch of the imagination. We here in southern Ontario and a majority of the individuals in this room would certainly not gain an understanding of what actually takes place in a lot of the remote and northern communities, First Nation communities, in Ontario.

I can recall being in Fort Severn in February. It was minus 40 out. I was speaking there. At the restaurant, the

only restaurant in the entire community, the question wasn't, "Did you want a menu?" or "What would you like?" It was, "Are you eating tonight?" I'm just trying to set a bit of a tone so that people gain an understanding of the difference between a southern Ontario community that we take for granted as compared to a First Nations northern community, or even the Far North.

When my father eventually finished his working career, I set him up, prior to myself becoming an MPP, working as a camp manager in an outfitting camp in Inuvik, where the Lieutenant Governor wanted to meet my father. So she left one day on a clear day and went in an open boat 120 kilometres through open water to get across to meet my father, because the economic benefit to that community of the entire territory was so significant that she felt it necessary to cross 120 kilometres of open water in an open boat with twin engines on the back. We take such things for granted.

But some of the concerns I have here are, effectively, what is taking place or what has taken place. The issue of the First Nations is so complex that I can tell you about the posts on the Grassy River and the concern by the First Nations community there, or the ceremonial hunts that were requested to take place in Presqu'île Provincial Park, or the moose hunting agreement by the Gold Lake band First Nations community and the impacts that they have, and what has not taken place.

My concern is that the issue that is coming forward is more complex than what's being brought forward here. What I see is the Far North Act, when Grand Chief Stan Beardy—and you only need to talk to Stan Beardy to know the amount of work I've done with his community and still am doing with his community to make those depressed communities of the Far North that much more, well, livable to our standard that we take for granted here in southern Ontario. They were so upset when we were in Sioux Lookout and Chapleau that the individuals responding to that were saying that they were willing to go to war over issues like this.

So how do we resolve this issue as a government and how do we move forward?

We have to find an answer or a common ground in certain areas that we can deal with. Ipperwash may be one of the ones they look forward to and want to hear. Mr. Bisson talking about the fact that the First Nations who are directly involved with the entire process had no knowledge of it only leads me to believe that it is easier for the current government to pass the issue on rather than to deal with it.

You see, when I had the privilege and honour to be Minister of Natural Resources, within the first week I pulled into a First Nation community and I sat in the band office, because I knew there was an issue of concern there. I asked, "Is it possible to see the chief?" They said, "Well, he's kind of busy right now." I said, "I don't mind waiting." So I sat in there for an hour and a half, and I waited. Lo and behold, they said, "The chief can see you now." I walked into the council chambers and I said, "Chief, I know there's an issue both of us are concerned with, and I thought maybe we should talk

about it." I said, "Oh, by the way, I'm the new Minister of Natural Resources."

Well, the entire process stopped. They brought in all the council members and all the legal, and they made it very clear that it was not a consultation. You see, most members don't know that with the First Nations communities, three consultations have now been determined to allow the federal government—to allow to step in to resolve the issue and appoint an arbitrator to make a decision on that. So I clearly said, "Let me make it perfectly clear this is not a consultation process." But the end result was that we spoke about issues that they had concern with that went back to, quite frankly, 1812, when that community was upset about the transfer of land and other aspects. I sat and I sat and I met with my bureaucracy at the time. They came forward with a plan. I looked at the plan, and I said, "How is this going to resolve anything? Let me see. The end result of this particular issue is going to be that they're going to say they didn't participate and that it's not going to be applicable to them. Is that not right?" "Well, Minister, yes, that's right"; that is exactly what was going to happen. I looked and I said, "The problem with this issue is that the minister 50 years ago didn't deal with the issue, and I have to deal with it now. Let's resolve it now, so that 50 years from now, the minister sitting in this position does not have to deal with this issue." I don't necessarily believe that passing the issue on to the federal government is going to resolve it.

Mr. Bisson mentioned the mid-Canada radar sites. It was at site 13 where the PCB contamination was seeping into the environment. There were findings that it was contaminating rabbits and other game; they were being affected by the PCBs because it was getting into the ecosystem at that time. Eventually—guess what?—polar bears were going to be affected, and on and on. So we had to act. We had to move forward and make a decision at the time to try to deal with these issues.

My concern here is that we're not dealing with issues in a fashion that will resolve them or setting a precedent which allows the province to move forward in dealing with these complex issues. I've only mentioned a couple of them because I know there are other members who wish to speak. But what I see this as is making sure that the impacts of the far north legislation that the First Nation community was so upset about—that we may now look back and say, "Well, we took care of that issue." That may make us happy, but it doesn't set up what's necessary to ensure that the province moves forward and deals with these issues in the fashion that they deserve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I certainly am very pleased to be able to rise and speak in support of this particular motion. I have the privilege of being the MPP for the communities of Lambton Shores and the Chippewa of Kettle Point and Stony Point, or as people often refer to the army camp, the Aazhoodena, which is the traditional name. This has a history—a long history—

in my area, and certainly with the events that happened in 1995, the community was torn apart. It had an impact on the community that—we're still healing in that area. That's why this motion is in place, because we have started that process.

I want to quote from Justice Linden's report, the Ipperwash report, in which he observes that "the land was the fundamental catalyst for the Ipperwash occupation and Dudley George's death. Therefore, resolution of the land issue must be part of the way forward and is key to the healing of those most affected by these events." I certainly agree with that. The land is symbolic. Anyone who understands First Nations and their relationship to the land understands that it's not about the money, it's not about the value or compensation; it's about what the land means to them in their traditions. This transfer of the park is very important to establishing that relationship. It certainly is very important in my area because, as I said, the community itself was torn apart.

Many of the people who live in that area have worked together in areas like Sarnia, Forest and Grand Bend. They have gone to school together at the high school in Forest. All of a sudden, with the events that happened and the death of Dudley George, there were a lot of rumours, a lot of mistrust, a lot of fear. People were in shock and horror about what had happened—and over time, embarrassment at the way the whole thing was handled. People didn't trust each other any more, and it became very important to have an opportunity to go through and try to work out how this had come about. That's why the inquiry was put in place.

When we were elected in 2003, Dalton McGuinty, as Premier, struck the inquiry. That inquiry spent over two years looking at the history of the community, looking at the First Nations history and at how this came about. As we went through that process, Justice Linden brought forward 100 recommendations. One of those recommendations was that the transfer of the park should take place; that it should go back to the First Nations. At that time, in December 2007, the then Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the Honourable Michael Bryant, made the announcement that the park would be transferred back to the First Nations. I, as the MPP for the area, had the opportunity and the privilege of being there when that announcement was made at Kettle Point. Certainly, that was the beginning of a process that this particular motion is part of. What happened was, as a consequence of that, there was the establishment of a resolution table that would work out how the transfer would take place, and then there was a transfer process agreement.

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That agreement, as part of its preamble, makes the statement that "the First Nation and Ontario agree that the transfer of the parkland is an important step in the healing process of the First Nation." While I absolutely agree with that statement, I think it came a little bit short because it also needed to say that it was part of the healing process for the entire community. That is something that has started to happen now, and this motion is a very important part of that process.

Through the resolution table and as they came about to do the actual transfer, we had a signing at Ipperwash park that included the then Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the Honourable Brad Duguid, and Chief Liz Cloud. Of course, both communities were there, everyone attended, and it was a beautiful reflection of the traditions of the First Nations. We started with a sunrise ceremony. We went through after that, and we had opportunities to see the photos and to hear about the history of what happened at the army camp and what happened when the federal government came and took the homes of these people off of the land so they could establish the camp. Then we went from there and we had the actual signing. We had traditional dance. From there we went and ate. Everybody shared food. It was just communities together, but it was an important part, again, of that healing process.

We need to do more to re-establish the trust and to move the healing forward, because that's a very, very important part of this whole process. We need to build the relationships, the trust and the healing.

The member for Timmins-James Bay talked about one of the other recommendations, which was the treaty commission and the establishment of a treaty commission for Ontario. I can tell you that last summer I attended the first conference that was held at Kettle Point at the public school there for this particular event. It was the exploration of how we will establish the treaty commission for Ontario. It was a two-day event, and it brought chiefs from all over the province together. But more importantly, it brought chiefs and First Nations people from across Canada, many of whom already have a provincial treaty commission. They came to share with everyone how their commissions worked, some of the best practices that they saw and, of course, some of the shortfalls and things that they felt needed to be improved.

For myself, as a member of the community there, I learned a lot about treaties and about why there is such mistrust by the First Nations of our government, because there is certainly a sad history there. I think that as a government here today, we have an opportunity to start that healing process. We have an opportunity to re-establish that trust. That's very, very important.

I also have the honour of chairing a committee between the municipality of Lambton Shores and the Chippewas of Kettle of Point and Stony Point. What that is also comes out of the Ipperwash inquiry. What we are doing there is trying to work out how we will co-manage the area of Ipperwash park and how we will move forward to develop economic opportunities for everyone.

One of the things that happened in that particular community was that after the Ipperwash events and after Dudley George was killed, the word "Ipperwash" had a very negative connotation. From an area where people would gather because of the beautiful beaches—we have pristine beaches there—suddenly customs people at the border would say to people, "Where are you going?" They'd say "We're going up into the Grand Bend area," and they would say, "Stay away from Ipperwash." That created a negative impact not just on Ipperwash but on

Forest, on Grand Bend and on the entire area, which just added more to the angst and the anger that was being experienced by the community.

We have needed to do this. We have needed to bring these people back together. What I can tell you about working as the chair of this particular committee is that, as the member from Timmins—James Bay talked about, we have different approaches to decision-making. While the municipal leadership wants a quick decision and says yes or no to a question, Chief Liz Cloud and her band councillors, of course, take it back to their community. They work on consensus, so things are slow, but we are moving forward and I'm really pleased. I want to thank all the parties in that community and in that committee for the work that they're doing, because we are talking about things that will re-establish that area as a tourist attraction, as a place to go, as a wonderful place to be where we can enjoy the water, the beaches, boating and, at the same time, also encourage tourism in that area.

One of the members of the committee actually talks about the days when everybody did that, when going to Ipperwash park was an enjoyable thing, when camping there was great, when they had a roller pad or park where roller skating was common and everybody enjoyed the summer evenings. Those were really enjoyable days. They want to see that return; they want to go back to that. At the same time, they also want to recognize what happened there, and so they want to establish a heritage building where they will have a memorial to Dudley George, where they will talk about the history and will talk about how this all came about.

The community around them, in Lambton Shores in particular, wants to be part of that. And so for all of us, this motion is critical to moving this forward, because we are moving in a direction that I think is exemplary in terms of how this government is dealing with the First Nations. I think we are creating a template for how it can be done for other communities in this province, and I think it's very important that we re-establish that trust, take time to do the healing that we need to do with our First Nations, because they are our First Nations. Meegwetich.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Mrs. Jeffrey has moved government notice of motion 173. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 25, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten

and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters / *Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: This is another one of my bifurcated debates, where I do half of it one day and half the next, or a little less than half today.

On the last occasion, as I was leaving, the parliamentary assistant, the member from Guelph, came and tried to correct some of the things I was saying. We got into a little bit of a spirited, although friendly, debate on what I was trying to say. Just to reiterate that, because I'm hoping she has a two-minute comment on this, it is the feeling in my community that we have been left out of the process, the fact that of 120,000 people, numbers of schools, both a Catholic board and a public board, there is not a single educational facility that will offer all-day learning kindergarten in the first year of the program. The people who are living there feel, what is the matter with this? What is the government program?

I recognize that criteria were set out by the province, I recognize that the school boards followed those criteria, and I recognize that, given the criteria that were followed, there was not to be a space for 120,000 people. Although when I talk to the member from Guelph, she has five schools in her riding—three public board and two Catholic board schools—that are being accommodated. And so she has a great many spaces available, and good for her, in her riding.

1450

Over the weekend, I went and tried to search out whether people in my riding had said anything about this, and there was one very small quote that I found. That was in the Toronto Star of January 8, 2010. The story is entitled "Full-Day Kindergarten Plan Draws Fire," by Laurie Monsebraaten. The quote I'd like to use was from part of the same example that I had given, which was Crescent Town, a community or a neighbourhood of some 15,000 people, amongst the poorest people in Toronto, and one of the 13 communities that have been identified by the United Way as desperately in need of extra opportunity, particularly educational opportunity. It, too, has no school available to the people who are there for all-day learning and all-day kindergarten.

A quote from one of the people who lives there: "Lima Ahmed, 30, who has a 4-year-old daughter in junior kindergarten at Crescent Town Elementary School, is outraged no schools in her east-end neighbourhood are on the list.

"We are all very disappointed our schools aren't included. We are one of the poorest areas of Toronto."

On the last occasion, I said I also wanted to spend a few minutes talking about what is not in the bill, and I recognize that Charles Pascal has made a series of recommendations—some 20 of them. I recognize that not

everything is doable within the confines of this economic time frame and the budget year that is coming up and that the Liberal government is proceeding on all-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds and has not committed and probably cannot, given the economic circumstances, commit to the other 19 recommendations.

I had an opportunity to sit down with a group of women who come from across Toronto on Friday in my constituency office. They asked for an appointment, they showed up, and I started to speak to them. Four of the five women who came forward live in Toronto Community housing. They are poor women. They are single mothers. They are people who struggle at the edge. The fifth woman was supportive of their cause, and although she did not live in community housing, she was not a person who described herself as well-off.

They were there to talk about what they believe is a shortcoming, in the short term, of this all-day kindergarten and general learning. They were there to talk to me about six- to 12-year-olds, who they feel are the forgotten people in all of this. I promised them on Friday that I would raise the concerns that they talked to me about for about a half an hour in my constituency office, because I think they're very realistic. They are smart people. They are people who care passionately about their children. They want to make a difference; they want this government to make a difference. They know that next year, or come this next month when the budget comes down, they're likely to be left out, but they wanted me to convey, on their behalf, how they feel about the all-day learning program, particularly as it relates to those children who are six to 12 years old.

They told me, and they are correct, that this is a critical period of a child's life, the time between six and 12 years; that there are now programs in place to deal with children with daycare issues; that there are programs in place to take care of children who are four and five years old in all-day kindergarten that are about to unfold and will be a reality in four or five years; and that there are programs that deal with youth, those who are 13 to 18 years of age, across the city. But they believe that the critical period of children's development—when there are cognitive skills learned, when there are social skills, resilience skills and self-confidence that is instilled in young people between the ages of six and 12—is not being funded to the extent that it should.

They pointed out, quite correctly, that there are one million children in need of out-of-school programs that are not getting those programs in the province of Ontario. Having come from Toronto, all of them, they gave me the statistics of the city of Toronto, which were a little surprising to me but obviously should not have been shocking. Only 9.5% of children between the ages of six and 12 are enrolled in an after-school program or a program that will give them something to do to occupy their time and teach them skills. That goes to show that 90.5% of all of the children in Toronto do not have access to those programs. They do not have access either because they are not offered in a locale which is close to

them or, more importantly and probably more likely, those programs are just too expensive for families to afford.

They talked to me about the need for accessible, affordable and quality programs, and that that would make a great deal of difference to their children. One woman with a bit of a tear in her eye talked about the difficulty that she had with her children as a single mother and that she was very worried that they were going to find themselves in trouble. She was very worried that her son would grow up and that he might belong to a gang; he might cut short any opportunity he had education-wise if he started to get in trouble, if he started to skip school, if he didn't have decent programs to go to. She asked me to do whatever we could to help her. She talked about people in her neighbourhood—they all did—where children are looked after by older siblings, and she talked about how all they have to do is look at television, and when they get bored of the television, the only alternative is to hang out with their friends, hang out in the malls, and eventually, she was afraid, get into trouble. There was nothing that was constructive. There were no sporting activities, there were no cultural activities, and there were no artistic activities to which they could aspire.

There was one woman who originally was from Mexico, a delightful woman who talked about what she had hoped to get for her children, and that was an opportunity to expand their field in the arts: to learn how to paint, how to sing, how to act. She felt that this was something that was sadly lacking in their communities.

Charles Pascal set out in narrowing the gap and talked about children in programs, and I quote him in part: Children who are in programs “tend to read, use computers, complete homework assignments and interact with adults more often” than those children who are not.

I know the government is looking at dollars. I know the whole thing will come down to money at the end of March or the beginning of April. But I ask you to think very clearly about what we can do for these children ages six to 12 as well, even if it is only a first step. I'm asking you to look at it in terms of the creation of jobs for youth care workers. I'm asking you to look at it for the creation of confidence for all of these six- to 12-year-olds who simply aren't getting the kinds of services that they need. And I'm asking you to look at the fact that it will likely, in the long term, lower the costs, because if you pay today to give a child an opportunity, if you pay today to give a child a chance to learn some additional skills so that they are not hanging around, so that there is not the potential trouble, you're looking a long way in the future towards having a better society.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I close and await the comments, especially those of the member from Guelph.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The Chair recognizes the member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: As advertised.

I do need to correct one thing, which is that I am no longer the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of

Education. However, I was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, so I would be happy to comment on the speech from the member for Beaches–East York.

The thing that we were discussing the other day was the fact that there aren't actually in the first-year implementation any schools in his particular riding, so I think it's perhaps useful to explain the process that the boards were asked to use in identifying a school for the first-year phase-in.

It's important to understand that this is a huge project and that it is going to be phased in over several years. So what we said to the boards for the first year was, number one, there needs to be space in the school, because we don't have time to build any new space. We recognize that there are lots of schools where there may be some space but it's not outfitted for little JKs and SKs, so we are going to have to reno the space. There are other schools where there is just no space for anybody extra, so we are going to have to have additions. But in year one, first of all, choose schools where there is space.

Secondly, in year one, choose schools where you don't disrupt existing daycare arrangements, so if there is a daycare already in the school and kids are maybe going to JK half the day and to child care the other half of the day, we don't need to disrupt that in the first year. We'll work out those sorts of situations later.

1500

Finally, amongst those schools in which there is space and there isn't already existing daycare, then look at what the community needs are, which ones—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today to make a few comments to the member from Beaches–East York on his comments. I was interested in the fact that he had listened to a number of his constituents on this bill, Bill 242, and some of the issues it raises.

I can tell you that some of my comments—I'll be able to speak after the next government speaker—are on the need at this time for this particular legislation and the impact it will have on other programs as well.

He says he has listened to his constituents. I've listened to my constituents very carefully—in fact, I think any of the members who listen carefully to their constituents often get re-elected—and one of the things I've found is that in this particular case, I haven't seen a screaming demand for this all-day kindergarten in any shape or form whatsoever. I've actually seen no one come forward in my office. I have had a number of people who have come forward opposing it, particularly when we have a \$25-billion deficit and this is going to be a very expensive program to implement.

I look forward to my own comments in a few minutes, and I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments to the member from Beaches–East York today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To my good friend the member from Beaches–East York, you touched on some of the issues that I think we need some action taken on if we're going to move to full-time SK.

First of all, I think it's fairly clear that the New Democratic Party is in support of extending SK to all kids. The government is not doing that in this case. They're doing only some of it on the basis of where they're at in their budget and what they feel they can afford.

I think there are a couple of questions that need to be asked, and I think Mr. Prue raised that quite well. One, what about the whole issue around daycare? There is going to be a certain adjustment in the daycare community with losing a whole bunch of kids who would normally go into the daycare system. A number of them now will be going into junior kindergarten, and that is going to have an effect on a lot of daycare operators around the province. What have we got planned to be able to deal with effectively trying to mitigate those losses in daycare so that they can continue to afford to operate?

I think one of the other issues is, how do you deal with those schools that have been doing junior kindergarten for some years? For example, le conseil des Grandes Rivières in the city of Timmins, which is the Catholic French board from Hearst all the way down south to Timiskaming, have been offering junior kindergarten to all kids and all communities for many years now and they've done that within their own budget. They've basically had to take from one part of their budget to the other to be able to afford to do this. Are they going to get some of this money back? They certainly should be put in the position of not having to lose further as a result of them being on the avant-garde of putting junior kindergarten in place. I think we need to make sure that they're dealt with in some way, shape or form so that they end up not losing fiscally for having done what was right in the first place.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm really happy to enter into this debate and express my full support for Bill 242.

In fact, I well remember during the 2007 election campaign, when I was listening to my soon-to-be constituents, how enthusiastic they were about this part of our platform. Certainly the people in my riding, people who are often commuting to work, are the parents of young children—and anything we can do not only to improve the chances of those children in terms of full-day learning but also to assist those parents, particularly with the extended-day part of this bill.

Creating the school as a hub is a concept that the York Region District School Board and the York Catholic District School Board are embracing exceptionally enthusiastically. Of course there are issues; there are implementation, logistical issues. This is why we are going forward in the way we are, in terms of phasing in this program.

Assuming the bill is passed, it is transformative in terms of our system of education for our youngest

children. I certainly remember, as someone who had been recently widowed and left with two children of five and four, just how difficult it was juggling the movement of my children between day care, school and after-school programs. Anything that can assist parents in this regard is incredibly valuable, as well as, of course, as Dr. Charles Pascal has expressed so admirably, ensures the early learning of our children, leading to an excellent education for them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Beaches–East York, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to thank the members from Guelph, Simcoe North, Timmins–James Bay and Oak Ridges–Markham for their comments. Time will only permit me to reply to two of them.

The member from Guelph set out correctly what the government did, but this is precisely why there are no spaces available in Beaches–East York: The schools are filled. The school where it is most needed is Crescent Town school, which they have just built out. They have taken out all the portables, they've built, and it is still oversubscribed. It a huge community in a very tight and compact area.

Secondly, daycares in the city of Toronto: I'm proud to say that over the last number of years, the city of Toronto has done a fairly good job in trying to identify daycare spaces, many of which, as I said before, are at risk. Some 2,000 to 5,000 daycare spaces will be lost unless this government comes across with the money.

Last, but not least, the need: This is the third criteria and maybe should have been the first criteria, because after there is no space in the school, after the fact that there are daycares in places like Toronto in sufficient quantity, it doesn't matter whether there's a need for it. Quite frankly, I think a great many parents in parts of the city of Toronto will be hugely disappointed, in the first or second year, to find that their children have been excluded due to the locale in which they live.

The member from Simcoe North raised an interesting point. He talked about how some people are opposed to this because of the \$25-billion deficit. I fully understand the \$25-billion deficit, as do all members on all sides of the House, I'm sure, but the reality is that this is an idea whose time has come.

I commend the government because you're having to look into doing a new program in spite of the deficit. I know there are going to have to be cost-cutting measures somewhere, but this is the time and the program is the right one. Charles Pascal has said the right things; please do them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

M. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir maintenant de soutenir le projet de loi 242 concernant l'apprentissage à temps plein pour les enfants âgés de quatre à cinq ans.

Dans le cadre du plan de la province pour bâtir un système scolaire plus solide et pour former une main-d'œuvre bien instruite, l'Ontario offrira un programme

d'apprentissage à temps plein aux enfants âgés de quatre à cinq ans.

Le programme sera progressivement mis en place en plusieurs phases à partir de septembre 2010. Des éducatrices et éducateurs de la petite enfance travailleront ensemble pour aider les enfants de quatre à cinq ans à apprendre durant la journée de classe ordinaire. Les écoles offriront aussi des programmes de jour prolongé avant et après les heures normales de classe, animés par des éducatrices et éducateurs de la petite enfance accrédités.

Il faudra s'acquitter des frais raisonnables pour ces programmes, mais des subventions seront accordées à certaines familles en fonction de leurs besoins financiers. Les frais seront établis localement par les conseils scolaires.

En septembre 2010, jusqu'à 35 000 enfants âgés de quatre à cinq ans bénéficieront de la première phase de la mise en œuvre de l'apprentissage à temps plein. Le programme sera progressivement élargi, l'objectif étant de le mettre en œuvre intégralement d'ici 2015-2016.

L'Ontario investit dans l'éducation de ses plus jeunes élèves pour mieux les préparer à la réussite future. L'apprentissage des jeunes enfants à temps plein améliorera les aptitudes en lecture, en écriture et en mathématiques; favorisera une transition plus harmonieuse à la première année; aidera un plus grand nombre d'élèves à connaître la réussite scolaire; et contribuera à bâtir une économie plus vigoureuse pour l'avenir.

Pour en savoir plus, lisez la feuille de renseignements sur mon site Internet www.shafiqqaadri.com.

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It's a privilege, an honour, a duty and a responsibility, of course, to speak in support of our Minister of Education, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, as well as the broader vision of the education Premier, Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty, with reference to full-day learning, Bill 242.

Of course, the phrase "full-day learning," I think, is resonant for those of us who are lifelong learners, because not only is full-day learning a direct application of lifelong learning, but I think it utilizes not only the capacity of our educational system more fully but also engages youth when they are particularly amenable to this sort of education.

In that respect, Speaker, I would, with your permission, like to share with you a couple of highlights from medical research which may at first glance appear to be a little bit, shall we say, beyond the usual standard deviation, or a little bit exotic. But they actually come from the realm of prenatal studies or the growing field of life before birth—actually, fetal studies. The ultimate goal to share with you in this particular research is to say that engaging kids at the ages of four and five may even be too late, because they're ready even before that.

The ear first appears in the third week of gestation and becomes fully functional by the 16th week. The fetus begins active listening by six months of gestational age.

We know from ultrasound observations that the fetus hears and responds to a sound pulse starting at 16 weeks of age. This is even before the ear construction is complete. The cochlear structures of the ear appear to function by about the 20th week, and mature synapses, meaning connections of nerves, have been found between six months and seven months of gestational age.

You will be interested to know that congenital malformations identified on ultrasound in infants in the United States are actually being treated before birth. For example, there are now formal programs of prenatal stimulation that are actually designed to begin in the third trimester.

The sense of hearing is the most developed of all senses before birth. In particular, some things that have actually risen to the attention of the lay press: The research of Michele Clements in London found that four-to five-month fetuses were soothed by the soft portions of the music of Handel, Vivaldi and Mozart but disturbed, as some of my colleagues are, by loud passages of Beethoven, Brahms and rock music. Newborns have shown a preference for melody that their mother actually speaks or sings, and they have a growing list of catalogued responses even within the fetus stage.

My point in sharing that admittedly somewhat exotic and perhaps not entirely clear information here is that the biology of our younger citizens in Ontario is ready not only at the age of four and five but, I would submit, with a growing body of medical research, even before. So I think it's especially appropriate and timely that we as a government are moving forward, yes, as some of our Conservative colleagues have pointed out, in a time of deficit. But I think that speaks even more strongly to the vision and commitment of the education Premier, Dalton McGuinty.

I would submit to you as well that this commitment for full-day learning is part of a broader program or an avenue of attack and approach with regard to lifelong learning that this government has been very skilled at and committed to. For example, as you will know, there are now several thousand people who have benefited from the Second Career program. There has been unprecedented multi-billion dollar support for our universities, colleges and training opportunities; for example, with the Second Career and apprenticeship programs.

Recently within my own riding, the great riding of Etobicoke North, I was pleased to be part of the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Humber College, north campus, to open the skilled trades centre, which had some award-winning individuals from across Canada as not only some of their teachers but also alumni—and, of course, the idea, as you'll hear more about during the throne speech on Monday, March 8, with regard to embracing digital technologies.

I am pleased to say that there are a number of schools within my own riding of Etobicoke North that have been flagged for the first phase in September 2010 for the full-day learning. They are, I'm pleased to announce, Albion Heights Junior Middle School, Elmbank Junior Middle

Academy, Greenholme Junior Middle School, Holy Child Catholic School, St. Angela Catholic School, and St. Maurice Separate School. According to my information, these will be up and ready with fully phased-in full-day learning as of September 2010.

I'm pleased to announce, as well, that the other schools, such as Beaumonde, Braeburn, Claireville, Dixon Grove, Elmlea, Highfield, Humberwood, John D. Parker, Kingsview, Melody Village, Monsignor John Corrigan, North Kipling, Rivercrest, St. Andrew, St. Benedict, St. Dorothy, St. John Vianney, St. Marcellus, St. Stephen, the Elms Junior Middle School, Transfiguration and West Humber Junior Middle School, are also now under active consideration. As was pointed out earlier during this debate, there are configuration issues, logistics, catchment area issues and so on.

I appreciate the remarks of my colleague from the NDP, the member for Beaches–East York, who did legitimately identify some of the growing pains, some of the, let's say, inequitable distribution during the first year of launch. Of course, we welcome the support of the NDP caucus and would simply state that as we've said clearly, this is really a phased-in program. Ultimately, what we're looking at doing is including into this program about 35,000 to 40,000 four- and five-year-olds across Ontario in approximately 1,400 classes in 600 schools. You can imagine that this is an Olympian task, if I can appropriately use that phrase, and that's why the government is devoting such extraordinary resources to it.

One of the things that also needs to be credited from the government's initiative, probably something that deserves more attention than it has had, is the fact that the government of Ontario has enabled our public and separate school boards to purchase one million new books for our elementary schools. I think that's an extraordinary and probably quiet victory: not something that gains headlines, not something the *Toronto Sun* will ask their usually very intelligent questions of regarding our caucus, but something that will have deep, long-lasting and impactful influence on the day-to-day, lived experience of many, many children. I share some qualities, in terms of our ridings, with the member from Beaches–East York. There are a number of newer and new Canadians in my own riding for whom, for example, the classics of literature or exposure to deep and well-stocked libraries in the English language may be something of a novelty. I'm pleased to say that our schools, and by extension our kids and therefore society in general and ultimately the province of Ontario and borders beyond, are going to benefit from such an extraordinary commitment.

I'll give you an example. One of my favourite books, which I happen to be reading at this moment—of course, I'm reading the adult version, and this is the children's version from one of my schools—is *Gulliver's Travels*. It's what is known as a *Classic Starts*; it's a kid's version. I think a lot of the very poignant and vicious political satire that is included in the original has been removed—

de-fumigated, as you might say—from this particular volume. I can only express delight to think that opportunities to read not only classic works of this nature are enabled and furthered by our commitment to have one million books purchased. The fact that four- and five-year-olds, and perhaps even kids on a much earlier basis than otherwise, adding perhaps a year's or even two years' exposure to these types of works of literature, and more broadly, of course, just engagement of the mind, whether it's of letters, of numbers, of socialization, of interacting with your peers, learning to behave, accepting the school routine—it is something that's really welcome and extraordinary, and part of the vision of the McGuinty government.

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What is important is that this is actually the fruit of some very deep and, I would say, vivid research by a well-known educator, Dr. Charles Pascal. Time and time again, we have identified, whether it's the Mustard report, which tended to be more towards the medical or biological or scientific aspects, or this particular report regarding engagement of kids, that the earlier the better. I think all of us in our own lived experience are, for example, very familiar with this idea that it is easier to pick up your first language, a second language, the rules of grammar and so on the earlier you engage as kids. To think that we will be introducing, welcoming, engaging a whole generation of schoolchildren a year, a year and a half, two years earlier than otherwise is something that I think will, once it reaches the level of history, be looked upon as a truly visionary moment in the government of Ontario. As we've mentioned earlier, ultimately what is it about? Engaging our children so that they will have a smoother transition to grade 1, and of course introducing this idea that life skills, socialization, math, letters, numbers, reading and so on are something very important and something that this government believes in very firmly.

With that, I would simply say that I'm delighted on many fronts: as a father, as a doctor, as the MPP for Etobicoke North, with a number of my more modest-income folks and new or newer Canadians, emerging Canadians. Everyone, in fact, will really be benefiting from this multi-pronged approach to education, whether it's our commitment to apprenticeship programs, our Second Career programs, our multi-billion dollar investment in colleges, training and university, the skills and trade centre at Humber College, our embrace of digital technologies, the one million new books, including *Gulliver's Travels*, and of course now the full-day learning program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I wish to comment on the member's remarks. It certainly makes me question that we would have to have a politically correct version of *Gulliver's Travels*. The aspects in there that are so offending in that great classic—I mean, let's face it, that's what makes it a classic, the content in the original

place. We try to politically correct everything we do here to protect society and make it better. I quite frankly think that we're going down the wrong path. If individuals don't find out at earlier ages what the reality of life is really like when they come out—as my grade nine son wrote in there, it's why he should get a job, to find out what it's like in the real world; that's his own comment, uninfluenced by me in any way, shape or form. But when we have to politically correct *Gulliver's Travels* to ensure that we don't influence the minds of young children, what are we really saying? I certainly have some concerns regarding the influence that we would try to perceive that we are having in one fashion or another. I don't think it's the right way to move forward. I think the reason that *Gulliver's Travels* was a classic in the first place was because of the content, not the politically correct content.

As well, the member spoke about aspects of the Second Career program. There's a great concern with the educational component in the skilled trades sector that hasn't been straightened out, in that individuals are taking the classes directly from one ministry but being tested in another, and the two never meet. So what's taking place—and certainly I know the individuals within the auto sector are very concerned that they're writing a test five and six and seven times because the twain are never meeting in that particular area of concern where we are losing skilled individuals.

Yes, we need to move forward with correct aspects of things changing in the education area, but I don't necessarily believe that a politically correct *Gulliver's Travels* is something we should all be concerned with.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I was just wondering about the reason that we need to have a more politically correct version of *Gulliver*; is it because we have to call him Guillaume? I don't know. Anyway, I thought that was an interesting comment.

I would say to the member across the way that I appreciate his comments. I also want to commend him on his French. I thought, "You've been taking lessons, sir, and it is showing." My sense was that it was pretty impeccable. I applaud anybody who takes the time to learn any other language, let alone French, Spanish or whatever it might be. I think that's something far too few of us do. I think the more we're able to speak languages, the better we are able to communicate with the world around us and understand some of the things that may be nuances that we don't catch otherwise.

I would also say that one of the issues that we really need to pay some mind to on this particular initiative—and I'll get a chance to speak to that a little bit later—is the issue of what's going to happen in the daycare sector. Is this a good idea? Obviously. Is this something I support? Of course. Full-time junior kindergarten is something we've been doing in the city of Timmins for years with the school boards in my area, because for years they've understood the benefit of doing this from the point of view of the children.

The point is, however, we are going to have some difficulty with some daycare operators who will lose a certain number of students—or clients, I guess they would be, children in their daycares—as a result of them moving into junior kindergarten. I think we need to have some kind of a strategy to deal with that, because in the end you don't want to—pardon the pun—throw out the baby with the bathwater, in the sense that we want to make sure we have a strong, vibrant daycare system that is able to absorb and properly deal with our children in the daycare sector, and then transition into junior kindergarten in a way that makes some sense, not only for the child but also for the daycare sector and for the schools themselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate and to follow the speech by the member for Etobicoke North. I think he said, in my opinion, that he sees this as a great step forward for this province, and I'd agree with that. When it was first announced, it was a policy that I agreed with. I knew it would make my community a much better community and my school system a much better school system and mean great things for the young people who are just entering the education system.

At that point in time, I didn't realize that I would be the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education and would actually have a role in the implementation of this program, so certainly I feel privileged in that regard for such a monumental move, because it makes our province a leader—a leader certainly in North America—in the way that we look at education of young people in their early years.

With the tough economic times we have right now in the province, there would be every reason for not doing this. You could come forward and say, "You know what? We'll give you a pass on this because times are tough." But we haven't said that. As a government, we realize that the global competitiveness of our economy, of the Canadian economy, depends in large part on how well-educated Ontario citizens are. That education takes place, obviously, starting with our young people, and the emphasis is on the education of our young people. What they're able to do in the early years really dictates what they're capable of in the years when they start to move into the workforce.

It's really heartening to watch the professionals as well in our society who are working together. Once again, there would be every reason to think that perhaps there would be a dispute on some of these issues, but I think the maturity that the early childhood educators and teaching profession have brought to this debate so far, and the co-operative nature with which they're approaching it is something which we should all be proud of. They should be proud of the work they do, and we should be proud of the work they do within our education system.

I'd like to thank Dr. Pascal for the work he's done in advising us and urge all members of the House to support this. It's time to move on. It's a great policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This program has its attributes; it also has some concerns. I have some concerns about it. One of those concerns is the lack of choice that it gives to parents. If a parent wants their child in a half-day program, I'm not sure that choice is going to be available to them. Having many, many parents in Ontario who are working in split shifts or working from home or at different times of day, it is very possible that they would want their children at home with them when they are there.

There's a huge learning curve when children are in that time of their life, the three-, four- and five-year-olds, a tremendous learning curve that they go through. It's said that they don't achieve that learning curve at any other time in their life. That's when they learn the quickest. I think it's extremely important that during that period of their life, they spend as much time as they can with their parents to learn the values and the way of life that their parents have led. I think their moral structure, their moral framework, is determined in those early years of life. Having their parents nearby as much as possible is a very positive thing.

This bill, I think, might very well limit that time and that flexibility of having a half day in junior kindergarten in particular and also in kindergarten. It would inhibit that ability for parents to spend time with their children, which I think is a very, very important part of their upbringing and their opportunities. It would be a shame if this bill went through without time in committee to hear from the many people who would want to have that flexibility in this bill.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Etobicoke North, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: As per protocol, I'd like to thank my honourable colleagues who spoke on this particular bill, the MPPs from Oakville, Oshawa, et Halton, et je veux vous remercier, monsieur Bisson, spécifiquement, pour vos remarques et le soutien de votre parti.

I can only agree with the MPP from Oshawa that we should get the original version of Gulliver's Travels into the hands of our Ontario schoolchildren as quickly as possible. But like Bill 242, that scenario is a phased approach. I would simply submit that material and literature selected for different age groups and determined to be appropriate is probably the way to go.

I am a little puzzled by some of the vocabulary or rhetoric choice by the MPP from Halton when he said that people should have a choice. It seemed to bring to mind the very noble Tory plan for the funding of religious and alternate schools, which I think has gone to a greater place from this Legislature.

Be that as it may, I think the government of Ontario is very firm in its commitment not only to education but, broadly speaking, to full-life or lifelong learning, of course, now beginning at the earliest ages. I'll quote, for

example, Mr. James Ryan, the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, who said, "We applaud the government for its leadership in improving education opportunities and services to children and their families.... Teachers welcome [these services] as part of a full-time integrated team approach that will work together to meet the needs of every student."

Of course, there are implementation issues; there are locale issues. There are issues that we have to resolve as we bring this forward to the many, many different locales, ethnic groups and neighbourhoods, and, of course, the physical constraints of our schools. But this is a visionary moment in the province of Ontario and certainly from the Ministry of Education.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I am pleased to rise today and take part in this interesting debate on Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters. The short title of the bill is the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010.

I mentioned earlier in my comments—when I did a comment in response to the member from Beaches—East York about the need for the program, I did talk about the deficit, and I just want to zero in on that for a few moments. We understand that this program will cost somewhere around \$1.6 billion—that's my understanding—for this year, beginning in the fall. That will, in fact, cover around 600 schools in the province of Ontario, and we understand that not all the schools will have this at this time.

Why I was so concerned about the cost of it is that we've had a very difficult time with another issue around young people and children, and that's our children's aid societies. It all sort of blew up this winter—before the break, anyhow. In Simcoe county, the Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County actually had a deficit of just under \$5 million. We had to do a lot of lobbying and, of course, the minister came through with some of the money—\$2.9 million of that money—just prior to the House returning. I believe it was just on February 12.

I'm not sure where the government stands on children's aid societies when you compare it to the money going to the school boards, because there is this extra money available, apparently, to the school boards. We looked fairly carefully at our children's aid society, as a number of others have in the province, and seen there are some flaws in the funding formula. All I'm saying is that young people in the children's aid society, many who are kindergarten and junior kindergarten age, are actually the most challenged, disadvantaged, marginalized children in our society. I really want to make sure that there will be funding available for those organizations before we start a brand new program when we're holding a \$25-billion deficit.

I've got a number of things I wanted to read into the record. Some of it has to do with funding, some of it has

to do with some of the comments coming from our local teachers' unions, the local school board and some from our own education critic, Mrs. Witmer, who will be, I believe, speaking the next time the bill comes forward. But, really, the current status—well, we're at our second reading debate.

"The bill"—and I'll just put this into the record—"amends the Education Act to provide for: the operation of junior kindergarten and kindergarten on a full-day basis; the operation of extended day programs outside the hours of junior kindergarten and kindergarten; and the appointment of early childhood educators to positions in junior kindergarten and kindergarten extended day programs.

"Sections 1 to 9 of the bill amend various provisions of the act in relation to full-day junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and early childhood educators.

"In particular, subsection 2(1) of the bill amends subsection 8(1) of the act by authorizing the minister to issue policies and guidelines respecting full-day junior kindergarten and kindergarten.... Subsection 6(1) of the bill amends subsection 170(1) of the act by requiring boards to operate full-day junior kindergarten and kindergarten in the board's elementary schools, to designate at least one position in each junior kindergarten and kindergarten class as requiring an early childhood educator, and to appoint early childhood educators to these positions. These requirements are subject to policies, guidelines and"—of course—"regulations.

"Section 10 of the bill adds part IX.1 to the act (sections 258 to 260.9 of the act) relating to extended day programs. Subsection 259(1) of the act requires boards to operate extended day programs in every elementary school of the board, outside the time when junior kindergarten and kindergarten are operated, for pupils of the board enrolled in junior kindergarten or kindergarten. Subsection 259(2) of the act permits boards to operate extended day programs for other pupils of the board. Subsections 259(3) and (4) of the act permit two or more boards to enter into agreements permitting one board to operate extended day programs for pupils of another board. Section 260 of the act requires boards to designate at least one position in each extended day program class as requiring an early childhood educator to lead the class, and to appoint early childhood educators to those positions. These requirements are subject to policies, guidelines and"—again—"regulations.

"Section 260.1"—and I'll be going over this in a moment when I get to some other issues—"of the act requires boards to charge the fees prescribed by regulation to parents of pupils enrolled in extended day programs operated by the board to recover the operating costs incurred by the board.

"Section 260.4 of the act authorizes the minister and, if authorized by the minister, a board, to enter into agreements respecting financial assistance to persons who are charged fees for extended day programs.

"Section 260.5 of the act authorizes the minister to issue policies and guidelines respecting the operation of

extended day programs. Section 260.6 of the act authorizes the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations respecting the operation of extended day programs. Section 260.7 of the act authorizes the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations respecting the provision of financial assistance to persons who are charged fees in respect of extended day programs.

"Section 260.9 of the act provides that it is an offence to knowingly furnish false information in any application, statement or report that relates to the provision, management or receipt of financial assistance under the new part IX.1.

"Sections 11 to 15, 17 to 19 and 22 of the bill make amendments to various provisions of the act in relation to early childhood educators.

"Section 16 of the bill amends the act by adding section 264.1. This section requires teachers and early childhood educators to co-operate with each other with respect to matters regarding the provision of junior kindergarten, kindergarten and extended day programs.

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"Section 21 of the bill adds part X.3 to the act (sections 277.46 to 277.51 of the act). Sections 277.46 to 277.49 provide for induction programs for early childhood educators and performance appraisals of early childhood educators. Section 277.50 requires boards, in certain circumstances, to make reports to the College of Early Childhood Educators. Section 277.51 requires the College of Early Childhood Educators, in certain circumstances, to provide information and documents to boards.

"Section 23 of the bill makes related amendments to the Child and Family Services Act.

"Sections 24 to 28 of the bill amend the Day Nurseries Act to allow agreements to be entered into for the provision of financial assistance to persons who are charged fees in respect of extended day programs, and to authorize the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations relating to the provision of such financial assistance.

"Sections 29 to 32 of the bill make related amendments to the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 and the Immunization of School Pupils Act."

Our message is really around this: The Premier is already admitting that the program will cost \$1.5 billion, and we can expect this number to grow, since no funding has been announced to build new physical space to accommodate the program; thus we do not know what the final cost will be.

This is a program that some trustees themselves are calling "one of the most ill-conceived and badly thought through programs the province has ever announced." Finally, there is no detailed plan of implementation.

The Liberals ran on a promise to cap class sizes at 20 students per class. By the Premier's own admission, this will increase class size to 26 students for our youngest learners. This program leaves little choice for parents who only want a half day program for their children.

Our position is that we support Dr. Pascal and we support in principle the idea of all-day kindergarten and

junior kindergarten. We know, as the member from Timmins-James Bay said earlier, that this is already part of the programs delivered by the French public board and the French Catholic board, and they've had it for many decades. However, we have some concern because of the cost.

I wanted to say that I had a couple of questions from our local school unions. As well, there were some concerns about the actual funding itself.

I want to read a little article from the local paper up in the Orillia area. It's by Nathan Taylor, and it reads: "Daycare Funding Unclear: School Boards Concerned They'll Have To Subsidize New Program

"There is concern that school boards will have to subsidize before- and after-school programs when the province's all-day kindergarten initiative begins in the fall.

"All-day kindergarten will take place at 16 of the Simcoe County District School Board's schools. School boards are also mandated to provide before- and after-school care.

"Individual boards will be determining how much to charge for that program, but some trustees fear they'll have to subsidize it in order to make it affordable.

"We can't afford to start subsidizing daycare for before and after school. We can't do it at the expense of our programming," said Jodi Lloyd, trustee for Ramara, Severn and Tay townships. "It's a wonderful service. However, it needs to be on a 100% cost-recovery basis."

"The concern from staff is that 100% cost recovery might not be achievable while, at the same time, charging a reasonable fee.

"If the fee is higher than other daycare options in the community, 'their likelihood is to leave the school and not take part in the extended-day program, and that kind of defeats the purpose of the extended-day program,' associate director Carol McAulay said, noting the point is to maintain continuity for the children.

"The Ministry of Education is also strongly encouraging boards to offer the before- and after-school program at the schools that are hosting all-day kindergarten, she said.

"Trustees had similar concerns when the Best Start program was introduced, said Orillia trustee Debra Edwards.

"There are more questions than answers," she said.

"More clarity will come when the province announces its education grants for boards, she said.

"Once we see the colour of the money, we will see if there's a shortfall, and if there is, there's a problem," she said. "Short of a miracle, I'm not expecting a good-news announcement in the upcoming education grants."

"All-day kindergarten will be offered at eight schools in the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, including St. Bernard's Catholic School in Orillia, and local trustee Jim Canning has some concerns, too.

"We don't know very much detail about what those costs are going to be. Certainly, it's a concern," he said.

"If the fees are too high for some families, they could still send their kids to the all-day kindergarten program, but before and after school, they'd be more apt to send them to daycare or a babysitter, he said.

"He also shared the concerns about funding.

"We need to be reimbursed by the ministry for whatever it is we do," Canning said, noting the ministry is the sole source of funding for boards. "Other than that, we'd have to cut into other programs, which we don't want to do."

"Staff at both boards are working with the province to determine the program requirements and costs.

"My concerns are the unknowns," said Michael O'Keefe, director of education with the Catholic board. "I don't know what the fee will end up being."

"But, he assured, the board supports the program.

"It's got great potential for providing a nice, seamless transition," he said.

"Lloyd feels the all-day kindergarten program—which is being phased in over the next five years, beginning this September—is being done very quickly," and added teachers, principals and boards across the province are concerned.

"It's coming out in bits and drabs here and there," she said.

"McAulay said the board has a 'pretty clear picture of what the program is to look like,' but there are still questions about what the board's role will be in some areas.

"We're not in the business, normally, of collecting fees," she said, noting there will be added administrative responsibility for billing and collecting.

"Some families receive government subsidies for day-care, also, and McAulay is unsure how or if that board will work with school boards.

"These are not insurmountable things," she said. "Early learning is a great program for kids."

I wanted to put that in the record because that was in our local media, the Osprey group, just a week ago.

I'm glad the minister is in the House today. I wanted to add this other letter I got today, and I'll just read it out. It says:

"Dear Mr. Dunlop:

"As the president of the Simcoe County Elementary Teachers' Federation, I am requesting that you demand that the Minister of Education and her government honour the collective agreement between the Simcoe County District School Board and the statutory members of the union of Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario—September 1, 2008 to August 31, 2012.... During question period, I urge you and your fellow MPPs to hold Minister Dombrowsky accountable for honourable all collective agreements negotiated in good faith.

"You need to vote against Bill 242 and specifically, section 260.5(2)(j).

"If Bill 242 with section 260.5(2)(j) is passed, the Minister of Education will be able to override our collective agreement and those rights that were negotiated in good faith and specifically, article 9.01(a), (d) and (e)

which deals with the class size of kindergarten classes. The members of Simcoe County Elementary Teachers' Federation and the Simcoe County District School Board have agreed to uphold our collective agreement, and we expect the government of Ontario to do this same. The passing of Bill 242 with section 260.5(2)(j) as currently written will enable the Minister of Education to staff full-day every day kindergarten classes with an average class size beyond those limits stated in our collective agreement.

"I look forward to question period when you question Minister Dombrowsky about Bill 242, which gives her the power to violate the collective agreement of the elementary teachers of Simcoe county.

"I am available to meet with you to discuss this issue."

It's signed by the president of the Simcoe County Elementary Teachers' Federation.

So we do have some very, very serious concerns about class size as we move this bill through the process. That's why we're in the House here today—to debate this.

I wanted to say to the members of the House that I think there are two things that are key to this right now. First of all is that I know there's going to be a throne speech next week. I'm assuming a few weeks after that we should see some kind of a budget. I think what's going to be very important in this process right now is the allocation of grants to the different school boards, and that usually comes sometime—I've seen it anywhere from early April, mid-April to mid-May.

I'm hoping that when we have our committee hearings—and we'll have our committee hearings, I expect, because it's such an important bill and it has such a huge impact financially on the province—these committee hearings will be held throughout the province, as we move forward in the spring months. I'm hoping that we can have a good debate and that a number of these people, like the president of the Simcoe county teachers' federation, people from the school boards, people from the media—that the opposition can have an opportunity to question the ministry on this particular bill and of course any amendments they may see, because a lot of it will be left to regulations.

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Finally, I think you've seen already that the school boards are very concerned with the funding that will be available to them to operate the boards. I know that just recently—I think it was last Friday—the Simcoe County District School Board announced that they may have to shave \$12 million or \$14 million out of their budget somehow to balance the books. That will have a huge impact on class size, on the number of people they hire and the number of schools that are built etc.

So I think there are two things here: the committee hearings and, of course, when the grants are rolled out. It would be nice to know, before we go into the committee hearings on this particular bill, what funding each board will get. I know that there's going to be some more debate on this and that we're going to have the throne speech and budget and all that, but it would be very

interesting if we could actually see the board allocation for 2010-11 before we go into committee hearings, in order to find out what those impacts will be on these particular school boards as we move through the process.

So those are really my concerns with it. As I said earlier, I still have a very serious concern about implementation at a time when we have a \$25-billion deficit. It wouldn't bother me at all to see this postponed a year or two, until we can maybe get into a better financial position. What I'm hearing across the province—or what I'm hearing in the room, at least—is that people seem to support Bill 242 but are quite reluctant at this time to give a strong voice of support until we see some of the things like committee hearings and what the funding allocation will be to each of the boards implementing all-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten.

Finally, I just wanted to say that we keep talking about four- and five-year-olds, who this is mainly affecting. The reality is that any of the children who are born between September and December 31 in a school year are actually three years old. The question has to be—whether the Pascal report is accurate or not—you have to look at whether a three-year-old should be in an institution the size of a school for all-day kindergarten and all-day junior kindergarten.

Thank you very much for the opportunity this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I hear the comments from the member from Simcoe whatever—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: North.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Simcoe North, okay. I knew I had the Simcoe right; I just wasn't sure which part of it. Where I come from, it's like you have it all or you have none, right? So anyway, Simcoe North.

I guess where I differ is that I think it's something that you can't afford to put off. I do believe that junior kindergarten is an integral part of our education system. I think moving to full-time JK ultimately is where we want to be; the question is how quickly we can do it and how we're going to pay for it. I think those are fair discussions for all of us to have, because it will mean that there will be some choices to be made.

We're also going to have to deal with the issue of how we put time on the clock, because I can keep on going for hours here.

Interjection: Go on, Gilles.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just noticed that the clock hasn't started yet. The other—very good. They're very good at adjusting the clock, I must say.

The other issue is how we're going to deal with what will be, I think, a problem for some—not all—of our daycare operators. We know that in all of our communities various daycare operators will have a lot of kids who would normally be in daycare ending up in junior kindergarten. I think that's going to tax, as they would say, some of these particular daycare operators.

I'll have a chance in a few minutes to have a few more words on that, but those would be my comments for now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to respond to the sharing of the member from Simcoe North, who spent some time talking about his concern about the deficit. We all have a concern about the deficit, but there's more than just a physical deficit we're talking about here. The simple truth of the matter is that studies have shown that some 28% of our children show up at grade 1—which, legally, is when they are required to start their education, emotionally, cognitively and linguistically not prepared to study. About 40% of those kids never catch up. It occurs to this government that in a world where the global economy is so strained, we need every advantage we can get.

Many years ago, the British did a 15-year quality study, known as the Bristol study, which indicated that the quality of oral language in a child's environment not only has a considerable effect on their learning development, it's the single most important predictor of childhood achievement in school. I think that's important.

My colleague referenced Gulliver's Travels; I'd like to reference Peter Pan if I can just for a minute. It's an enduring tale. Peter is drawn to the ledge by the stories. He loses his shadow, he meets Wendy, and he invites her to come to Neverland to read to the lost boys. It occurs to me that Peter might not have been afraid to grow up if his parents had read to him at an early age and if more parents would read to their kids at an early age, because in books, literature and language, imagination flourishes. So, too, do economies related to it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise to respond to the member from Simcoe North. There were two issues in particular that he raised in his 20-minute debate, and I am happy to participate and have part of this discussion, because I don't want them to be overlooked.

The children's aid societies across Ontario, since the fall, have been struggling with some very serious deficits. We all know that; we've been back in our ridings for the last number of months. Our party raised it in question period in the fall.

To me, as we discuss early childhood education and full-day learning, I look at the dichotomy of trying to fund that when we aren't sufficiently funding the children's aid societies across Ontario. Our most vulnerable children and families are literally being cut off from the resources that they need to thrive and survive. Yet, instead of having the McGuinty Liberals actually deal with that issue and bring forward proactive solutions to it, what we have is, "Let's have an exciting new program."

I wish, instead, what we could discuss and debate here are some ways to actually solve some of the problems that we have in the children's aid societies across Ontario. Whether you're talking about the north, in Pikangi-

kum; in my own riding of Dufferin and Peel, we're struggling with high growth numbers and the children's aid society, quite frankly, has not been able to keep up. We've had a government that is ignoring that issue, ignoring that problem and instead wants to have the shiny new bauble of the full-day learning. I think it's a terrible shame that mandated programs are being ignored for new programs when we simply cannot afford them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Simcoe North, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Timmins-James Bay, Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale and Dufferin-Caledon for their responses. What I want to say is that in a perfect world this—with Dr. Pascal's recommendations—we'd completely understand it and we would like this to be able to take place. But, again, there are a few things I wanted to put on the record about before we move ahead and pass this.

I've read a letter into the record from the teachers' federation. After all the work we've done in trying to get class sizes down, are class sizes in fact going to increase to 25 or 26, the average class size for junior classes? If that's the case, that's kind of a step backwards in itself. As my colleague said, there doesn't seem to be the money for things like children's aid. We know that there's a flaw in the way children's aid societies are funded because, for example, in Simcoe county they get \$30 a day less per child than the GTA children's aid societies. That's what's causing these huge deficits. So we have to fix those sort of things as well. For the whole budget, that's only going to cost something like another—\$60 million will correct that. We haven't got \$60 million for that, but we've got \$1.6 billion to implement the all-day kindergarten. At the same time, I've talked to a lot of teachers, and they're really concerned about this. A lot of teachers don't have the basic supplies they need for their classrooms. They're actually going out and purchasing it themselves, so they're having a bake sale just to buy basic supplies for the classroom. Those types of things have to be addressed.

1600

I'm looking forward to the committee hearings and I'm looking forward to the budget, when we see the allocation for these boards.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

M. Gilles Bisson: C'est avec une certaine anticipation que je me trouve dans ce débat aujourd'hui, parce que c'est quelque chose qu'on a déjà fait il y a assez longtemps chez nous, comme dans d'autres comtés à travers la province de l'Ontario. Il y a certains conseils scolaires qui ont compris, droit au début, qu'il y a des bénéfices de donner à nos jeunes l'habileté de rentrer à l'école une année plus tôt. On sait, par exemple, avec toutes les études qui ont été faites jusqu'à date, que quand on prend le temps pour commencer l'instruction

avec nos jeunes le plus tôt possible, les jeunes vont bénéficier dans le plus long terme. C'est quelque chose sur lequel, étude après étude, sans question, tout le monde est d'accord.

L'initiative, je veux dire droit au début, est une initiative que, je pense, on peut tous accepter et qu'on peut tous dire est une bonne affaire. La question devient les détails. Comment est-ce que ça va marcher? Qui va payer ça? Comment s'organiser pour s'assurer que le plus de jeunes possible sont capables de bénéficier de certaines politiques de la prématernelle? Donc, je veux commencer par dire qu'il n'y a rien de nouveau pour chez nous. Le conseil des Grandes Rivières, tel que d'autres conseils dans notre comté, a déjà, depuis des années, offert ce programme aux parents, et les parents ont choisi avec leurs pieds. Les parents ont décidé d'envoyer leurs jeunes dans ces écoles-là et qu'ils entrent en prématernelle pour un cours à plein temps. Pourquoi? Parce que les parents aiment beaucoup ce choix. Ils réalisent, je pense, pour une couple de raisons, que c'est avantageux pour leurs jeunes de rentrer à l'école de bonne heure, de s'acclimater à l'école pour se préparer pour ce qui va être une assez longue interaction avec l'école de la prématernelle, aller au deuxième, puis, après ça, au postsecondaire, s'ils sont assez chanceux.

Donc, les parents chez nous ont choisi. Moi, quand on a eu nos deux filles, Julie et Nathalie, il y a assez d'années, quand elles étaient plus jeunes, il y avait seulement la prématernelle à mi-temps. Nous, comme parents, avons choisi d'envoyer nos enfants à la prématernelle à mi-temps parce qu'on a réalisé que c'est un bénéfice. À l'autre bord, ça aide beaucoup les parents aussi, parce que certains parents, tels que mon épouse dans le temps, travaillent. Donc, ça aide beaucoup d'avoir quelque part où on peut amener nos enfants où ils sont en sécurité et, en même temps, ils sont en train d'apprendre.

Donc, du point de vue de donner un support pour les parents et, spécialement, pour les familles monoparentales qui se trouvent seules à élever les enfants et travailler en même temps, ou pour les familles où les deux parents travaillent, c'est une aide. On peut aider ces parents pour s'assurer que les jeunes ont quelque part où aller dont ils bénéficient. Je sais que dans le cas de nous autres, notre petit-fils Nathaniel, qui a maintenant un an et demi—ma fille et son mari, Chris et Julie, ont décidé de mettre Nathaniel dans la garderie. C'est quelque chose qui est assez dispendieux pour les parents. Donc, du point de vue de dépenses pour les parents, la prématernelle est assez, certainement.

La question devient seulement, pour les conseils scolaires tels que le conseil des Grandes Rivières, qui font affaire depuis des années, comment assurer que ces conseils-là, qui ont été à l'avant-garde, ne se trouvent pas dans une situation à être, comment dire, punis pour être à l'avant-garde; pour s'assurer, quand le financement déroule du gouvernement provincial aux conseils scolaires, que les conseils qui ont déjà mis en place ces programmes sont capables de bénéficier avec l'argent supplémentaire dans leur budget annuel.

Les conseils, tels les conseils chez nous et, j'imagine, les autres conseils dans la province qui ont fait le même, ont payé pour la prématernelle avec les fonds qu'ils avaient déjà dans leur conseil. Ils ont décidé, à la place de dépenser de l'argent dans l'enveloppe A ou B, de mettre une enveloppe à la prématernelle et payer pour les programmes de prématernelle.

On a besoin de s'assurer que ces conseils-là, qui ont été à l'avant-garde, ne se trouvent pas dans une situation à dire, « Écoute. C'est vraiment triste, mais à la fin de la journée on va commencer des nouveaux programmes prématernelles et on ne va pas assister directement les conseils qui ont déjà mis ça en place ». Je pense que c'est important.

Le deuxième point, et c'est le point, je pense, que le membre de Simcoe North a soulevé, c'est la question des enseignants et enseignantes. Je sais que dans mes rencontres avec les enseignants et enseignantes, justement mon gendre, Chris—that was funny, a slip of the tongue. Mon gendre, lui, enseigne au secondaire dans le système catholique anglais. J'ai eu l'occasion de parler à lui, mais j'ai parlé à d'autres éducateurs et éducatrices dans le comté, et ils me disent qu'ils ont un peu peur qu'à la fin de la journée, pour ceux qui ont déjà payé, ça veut dire que le nombre d'élèves dans une classe va possiblement augmenter.

C'est quoi le point? Est-ce qu'on ne veut pas s'assurer que les élèves ont une expérience positive à l'école? L'un des clés pour ça, c'est de s'assurer que les éducateurs et les éducatrices ne sont pas surchargés dans la salle de classe, et de s'assurer qu'on ne pénalise pas les jeunes et les profs par manque de financement en forçant des conseils scolaires, pour des raisons fiscales, à augmenter le nombre d'élèves dans les classes. Parce que si on va dans cette direction-là, ça va être un recul complet par rapport à ce qu'on a essayé de faire droit au début.

Donc, oui, c'est une bonne initiative, mais est-ce qu'on s'assure qu'on ne pénalise pas les profs, les jeunes, les conseils qui ont déjà eu ces programmes en place et ceux qui vont les avoir au futur?

The other point I want to make is on the issue of daycare. This is something that our critic, Rosario Marchese, raised, and I think it's something that the government, to date, has not seen fit to respond to in a meaningful way. There is going to be an effect on daycare operators. Let's be real about this. There are a whole bunch of communities across this province where junior kindergarten was not available and those children ended up in daycare centres. Those kids who would normally be in daycare, who next year and in the following years will go into junior kindergarten, are not going to be in daycare. It will represent a fiscal problem for certain daycare operators, because those kids might represent the numbers they need to make the difference between making a for-profit daycare centre profitable or not profitable; and in the case of not-for-profit, being able to stay without a deficit.

I believe the government needs to be a lot clearer when it comes to what their plan is vis-à-vis daycare operators. What is the overall approach of the govern-

ment to ensure that daycares are not penalized as a result of losing kids who would normally be in their daycare system when they end up going to junior kindergarten? Not to say that we shouldn't be going in this direction—I think we all agree—but we need to make sure that the government speaks to this particular issue insofar as what it means for daycare operators.

The other thing is something the member for Beaches—East York raised, and I think this is something that by and large has been overlooked; that is, there are a number of schools and a number of school boards that don't have space. In the case of the member from Beaches—East York, he has no expansion of junior kindergarten in the schools in his riding, and the reason for that is very simple: Those schools are at the max of their capacity. How do you ensure that they're not penalized in certain areas because there happens to be increasing enrolment in certain parts of the province and there isn't the amount of space needed within the schools to be able to afford space for a junior kindergarten program? Again, that's something we need to address, and we've not seen the government speak to it. Certainly, you don't want to put yourself in a position where you really have a disparaging way of implementing this particular program. You want to make sure, at the end of the day, that all kids in the province are able to benefit from what will be, I believe, a step in the right direction when it comes to full-time JK for all kids in the province of Ontario.

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I wonder how that's going to happen if, for example, there's a number of schools that don't have the space and we don't have the mechanism and the funding in order to ensure that the space is existent for those particular schools, and how we're going to deal with the issue of possible increased class sizes as a result of some schools not being able to afford it because they've already funded these types of programs before and are having to increase the student-teacher ratio in order to offset the cost if the province is not ready to move forward with the funding necessary.

Those are some of the concerns that I have. I would just say to the government, as I said at the beginning, it's a step in the right direction, but I think we need to speak to some of those other issues that are left to be dealt with. Unless you deal with them, I think we're going to be in a position where, quite frankly, we will certainly have difficulty being able to implement this program overall.

Being that this is an education debate, I want to raise another issue, and that is, what does this mean for kids in First Nations communities? The unfortunate truth is that, except for some of our isolate school boards, the large majority of aboriginal schools fall under INAC; they fall under the federal government. And of course the federal government is not in the business of providing full-time junior kindergarten, let alone providing good education, I would argue, in some cases.

I think it's high time that we do have the debate here in the Legislature and that the cabinet consider getting into discussions with First Nations and the federal gov-

ernment in order to figure out how we can transfer the education system on reserve over to the province. I think this is an important step towards making sure that we resolve some of the issues of capacity within our First Nations communities.

I'll tell you now, it would be shocking to some to know that the number of kids who graduate out of grade 12 on reserve is very small. It's nowhere near about 10% or 15% of kids who enrol in junior kindergarten and who end up making it all the way towards a grade 12 diploma. It's a very small percentage.

People will ask themselves the question, why is that? I think it's a number of reasons, having to do with poverty and how it affects those communities; overcrowding in houses where kids find themselves in a house with 20, 25 people, not having the time to be able to study or for peace of mind. But it's also the policies of the federal government vis-à-vis education.

I just want to say, while I've got the opportunity and the floor, that we should seriously start thinking about how we're able to move towards creating legislation that would allow First Nations local education authorities and band councils to opt into the provincial system under an aboriginal school board.

I've got to say, as a francophone, one of the reasons that I'm still able to speak French and understand and live the French language and culture is that a large part of it has to do with my ability as a child to go to a French school. A lot of the things that I learned over the years in regard to what it is to be a francophone were learned at school. Yes, my parents, both my mom and dad, are francophones. One is a Lehoux, the other one is a Bisson. Of course, the traditions were carried on as far as cuisine, music and many of the things that are important in my culture, but it was reinforced at the school. More importantly, I got to speak my language outside of the household. If I could have spoken French only at home, there would have been far less opportunity to be able to speak French. In communities where you're not a majority, you probably lose the language. If you live in Hearst, I'm not too worried; you're going to speak French at the end, even if you didn't have your school. I don't advocate they shouldn't have one. If you live in Timmins or Sudbury, you'll probably get by. But if you live in a lot of other communities around Ontario, if you don't have the French school, it's very hard to be able to maintain your language.

This brings me to the point of aboriginal people. First Nations—Crees, Ojibways, Mohawks, whoever—there are a multitude of languages within the First Nations communities that have been lost to the second and third generation since the time of residential schools, because the residential schools said, "You will not speak your own language." Many of the people of my generation didn't get an opportunity to speak Cree where I come from, being the James Bay and the Timmins area, either Wabun or Matawa or the Mushkegowuk people. A lot of them didn't get an opportunity to speak French at school, and as a result, because they were in residential school,

don't speak Cree today. Then, living in their own community, a First Nations community on reserve, a lot of their kids don't speak Cree as a result of not being able to speak it at home because the parents lost the language. One of the only links that they have, other than what's offered in the community, is the school. Yes, there have been great strides made on the part of normal local education authorities in each community to teach Cree in the classroom, but it's not a Cree school; it's an English school. So the child is subject to maybe 45 minutes of Cree per day rather than having Cree on an ongoing basis in the study of history, geography, mathematics and other things that are learned.

So I think that one of the things we need to do is to take a look at how we can create an aboriginal school board for the aboriginal community that is run by aboriginal people; one that follows provincial curriculum and that funds to the same level—and I would argue that you'd probably need a little bit more on the James Bay—as the provincial system. If you're able to do that, I think it would work itself towards finding some longer-term solutions to some of the problems we have when it comes to capacity development in those communities.

I want to give former Minister Wynne some credit here, because she actually was engaged in that discussion with some of us in Moosonee and with myself, as a provincial member of Parliament. She understood the argument, and I give former education minister Wynne some credit. She was trying to figure out how we were able to do that.

One of the things we looked at was that, in the isolate school boards in Moosonee and Moose Factory, where there are three schools on the English public side, there was an ability to merge those schools together to create the beginning of what could have been an aboriginal school board. If we could have got there—and I'm still trying to have some discussions with the current Minister of Education; I'm hoping it's the same with the new minister—that would allow us to create the board and, in the longer term, allow First Nations communities if they so choose to join what would be the James Bay aboriginal school board. We would then be able to have aboriginal people work towards developing their curriculum and making sure that kids are not taught strictly in English but also in Cree. More importantly, they would have some control over what happens in their school boards.

Another little-known fact around aboriginal schools that I think people should know about: If you're in a INAC school, a Department of Indian Affairs school, you get 50% of what a child would get in the provincial system. You ask yourself why aboriginal children have a hard time graduating from JK all the way to grade 12? Well, that is one of the reasons. We have a provincial system of education which provides I think about \$12,000 per pupil per annum in order to fund the school: to make sure that we've got proper classes and a facility that is in good repair, janitors, teachers, teaching books and all that kind of stuff. An aboriginal community gets

50% of what the province gets. You ask yourself why the children in Attawapiskat are in portables rather than being in their own schools. Why are kids in Fort Severn in a mouldy school that they've had to close and go into portables as well? Why is that the norm on a lot of our reserves?

Part of it is, yes, the federal government's unwillingness to advance the capital to fix it, but the other part is that the ongoing maintenance budgets aren't there. You are not able to hire the staff you would need to get a facility and maintain it on an ongoing basis in good repair. It costs a lot of money to maintain a building, as we all know. If you look at our school boards across Ontario, they have staff who not only clean the floors—that's one part of it—but make sure that boilers are maintained, that if there is humidity it is dealt with so it doesn't create mould etc.

I'll give you one quick little example of just how expensive it can be to not have proper maintenance. In Attawapiskat at the Father Vezina school, which was the high school prior to it being closed, the sprinkler system froze. When it finally blew, it flooded the school. Why was that? Because they did not have the money in their operational budget to have somebody blow the system out in the fall to make sure that there was no water in the system should the pipes freeze. The way that system is supposed to work, it should only charge with water in the event that there is a fire. What happened was that there was a faulty valve. The water got into the lines and nobody knew. Of course the lines are up in the attic, which is frozen because you don't heat attics; that's how you build buildings. The pipes froze and then they busted. I remember the story: People were saying, "Well, look at that. They didn't take care of their school. No wonder the pipes busted." Well, there was no money in the budget to have staff to even think about those issues.

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So I say, we really need to think about how we're better able to do a job in Ontario, treating Ontario citizens who live on First Nations, to provide a good education. I think part of that is that we need to take a look at the possibility of creating an aboriginal school board.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for this time to debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: J'ai écouté attentivement les points soulevés par mon collègue de James Bay—c'est bien ça, oui? Je peux vous dire qu'actuellement, il ne faut pas épeurer le public avec ce projet de loi 242 lorsqu'on est porté à dire combien vont être les coûts additionnels. Je dois dire qu'actuellement, je crois que la majorité, sinon tous les conseils scolaires de langue française publics, ont déjà ce service en place, ici même en Ontario. Je sais que dans l'Est ontarien, il existe dans toutes les écoles publiques françaises. Je peux dire aussi que j'ai un petit-fils, Joshua, qui fréquente les écoles catholiques françaises, et actuellement, il reçoit ce service-là qui est en place.

Mais la beauté de ce programme-là, il faut dire, est que nous allons avoir la chance d'avoir des programmes après les heures de classe. Il est très, très important, avec ce projet de loi-là, qui devrait être appuyé à 100 % par l'Assemblée ici même et par les trois partis.

Je dois dire qu'actuellement, on doit travailler avec différents ministères. Je dis avec différents ministères parce qu'après les heures de classe régulières, on doit avoir les programmes de santé, on doit avoir les programmes pour la petite enfance. Qu'est-ce que nous allons faire après les heures de classe? Je suis convaincu que le ministère de la petite enfance et le ministère de la Promotion de la santé vont travailler étroitement avec la ministre responsable, qui est M^{me} Dombrowsky.

Oui, c'est définitivement un bon programme, et j'espère que nous allons avoir de l'appui. Actuellement, il y a déjà des coûts à attacher pour la garde après les heures de classe, mais il ne sera pas nécessaire de prendre les enfants et les déménager dans une garderie à l'extérieur de l'école. Donc, c'est la beauté de ce programme, surtout pour le secteur rural. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to commend the member from Timmins-James Bay for his remarks, especially when he elaborated on a number of the concerns that are particular to northern communities with education funding, and on personal experiences; obviously, he always brings something to the debate.

On this side of the House, we support this bill in principle. We're going to speak to it later—a number of us have had an opportunity. I know that in my community there are four schools that are going to have the opportunity to advance this and be able to take part in it. I've heard from a number other parents who aren't as lucky. They live on the opposite side of the road and are not able to take part. That's something that I know a number of boards are faced with, and some of our offices are hearing that—a number of people see the merit in a program like this. I've had other people also call concerned about where the money to do something like this is coming from when we have a \$25-billion deficit. But that's something we'll talk about later on in our remarks.

Also, as I said, it creates unequal access. I've had some parents contact me about that. They would like to take part in it; they see the issues about that. The schools in my community that are going to be able to take part in this are Colonel Cameron Public School in Corunna, Johnston Memorial School and Queen Elizabeth II School in Sarnia, and St. Benedict Catholic School, also in Sarnia.

At minimum, all-day kindergarten is estimated to cost somewhere in the area of \$1.5 billion when it's fully implemented, and also increase class sizes. Those are concerns of a number of taxpayers and voters in my community.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak at this time and look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Timmins–James Bay for his detailed exposé on this legislation and his even more detailed exposé on some of the challenges that need to be met and clearly are not going to be met. The fact is that for aboriginal children the gap, if anything, will grow, and the gap will widen, which will certainly create other social challenges in the future.

I think it's worth noting from his discussion that the issue is not about the what—what must be done. New Democrats recognize what must be done in terms of funding early childhood education. The question is going to be about the how. It's very easy to make an announcement, but then to determine where the funding is going to come from and if the funding is going to be equitable and if the funding is going to allow this without cutting other programs in the schools or without reducing child care resources elsewhere—those are the questions which need to be asked and questions which I think this government needs to answer. Because these are indeed the things which are troubling school boards; these are the things which are troubling municipalities, municipalities which are in fact having to close down child care centres because there's not adequate funding. These are some of the questions that need to be asked and answered, and I think my colleague from Timmins–James Bay did an admirable job of zeroing in on those questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to offer a quick couple of minutes on the remarks that have been made so far on Bill 242. I would begin by saying that in my time here, going on seven years now, there have been few pieces of legislation that have been before us that I think have received as much broad support from both sides of the House as has this one. I understand that the third party is very likely going to support this at third reading, and I think I learned just a little bit earlier here today that the official opposition, the Conservatives, were interested in supporting it, at least in principle, as well, so we'll see where that goes.

As with all legislation, there is always some criticism. Nobody ever just nails it perfectly. They have their role to play. But even that criticism, I would suggest, has been fairly muted. Some of it has been about the fact that perhaps we're not rolling this out fast enough. I think that people who are following the goings-on in the Legislature here in Ontario understand the economic situation that we find ourselves in. I think the fact that the Premier has continued this commitment—up to 35,000 three-, four- or five-year-olds, nearly 1,400 classes will be affected, and almost 600 schools. Some might characterize this as not following through, but this phase-in, I would suggest, given the economic circumstances that we find ourselves in, is a very clear signal that the Premier and our Liberal government here are going to

continue our commitment to education. I would also suggest the budget will reflect our continuing commitment in the health care field. The number attached to this is \$1.5 billion, and that is no small amount of money.

It's also important to mention to people that this is an entirely voluntary program. This is not mandated. Parents can voluntarily enrol their children or not, if they so choose. I can tell you that in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan I had two great events announcing this, one in Atikokan and one in Thunder Bay—very well received by everybody that I had an opportunity to speak with on this issue. We look forward to seeing this go forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member from Timmins–James Bay, you have up to two minutes to respond.

M. Gilles Bisson: J'aimerais remercier le député de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell pour ses commentaires. Mais le point que j'essayais de faire est que oui, les conseils francophones, par la plus grande partie, ont mis en place la prématernelle il y a longtemps. Comment va-t-on s'assurer pour financer ces conseils-là, après qu'ils ont déjà mis en place ces programmes-là? C'est le point que je faisais.

To the members for Sarnia–Lambton, Kenora–Rainy River and Thunder Bay–Atikokan, thank you for your comments. As I said, it is a good thing. We in the city of Timmins and area have been benefiting by having full-time junior kindergarten offered to the kids of our community. We've been at the avant-garde of that and I think we very much benefited. We all understand the reasons why the earlier you get kids in school, the better it is. The issue becomes, number one, how do you make sure not to penalize those school boards who have offered it within their existing budgets, and that there's an offset so that they don't end up falling behind other school boards? And what are you going to do in year three, year four, year five of this program? That's going to be the bigger question, as reminded by my friend Mr. Hampton.

To the last point, in regard to aboriginal schools, there's a whole raft of kids, and the majority of them are aboriginal kids, who are not going to get the benefit of full-time junior kindergarten. Why? Because that system, by and large, is a federal system. I spoke to the need to be able to engage in discussions with First Nations and the first government, along with this province, in order to find a way to create provincial aboriginal school boards so we can take those kids and bring them into the provincial system, where I believe they'd be better served.

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As I pointed out, if you're a child in an aboriginal school, you get 50% of what any other kid gets in the province of Ontario. How do you ensure that that child is able to compete with any other child when their education is devalued by the amount that it is? I think that is a sad, sad point of the history of this country and something that, quite frankly, we should address with the briefest possible delay.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am required to interrupt the proceedings to announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on second reading of Bill 242.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Mr. Speaker, we would like the debate to continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Nelson Mandela said, "Children are the rock on which our future will be built—the leaders of our country for good or ill, which is why the rich potential in each child must be developed into skills and knowledge that our society needs to enable to it prosper."

If there was a foundational statement about why we are doing this, I don't think it could have been better said. We sometimes lose perspective from generation to generation about the values that drove many of us to public service.

My grandmother came here at 18 years old. She arrived in the great city of Hamilton not speaking English or French, with no trainable skills, leaving a country where one of the older women in her village in Ukraine said to her, "Don't go to Canada, Maria. It's frozen there. You'll starve. You can't grow food." This courageous young woman, through Italy, got onto a boat and came halfway around the world.

She found an extraordinary experience here. She raised seven children in a two-bedroom apartment in downtown Hamilton. Her husband in his 40s had a stroke. He worked for the railroad, and he wasn't able to work. At that point, my grandmother was left with seven children at home to raise with a husband who was incapacitated and needed as much support as those children.

I can't imagine what my grandmother would say to this Legislature about the choices that her family could have today if they had come to Ontario 100 years later or 50 years later. We are a most blessed and privileged generation. We are privileged as Ontarians to be able to have this discussion today, to be able to talk not only of the inheritance from our parents but to actually stop in our tracks and, for a silver moment, ask ourselves why we all sit in this House. As Nelson Mandela suggested, we sit in this House for one reason: We sit in this House for our children.

I joined the Liberal Party, and I ran predominantly because of our children. I was elected largely because of this policy and the values of the Liberal Party and the values that it expresses to my fellow Ontarians, whether they arrived here last week or whether they have lived here for 17 generations. I could not be prouder to stand up and argue and vote for a piece of legislation other than this piece of legislation, because we inherited this great province, this great educational system, our rights, our health care and the fundamental values that bind all of us, no matter what party has called us here or which party we have joined. That is a legacy from generations of Ontarians who came to this country or who grew up and

survived residential schools with so very little, so few resources, from people who survived holocaust, war, famine, displacement, governments, and grew up in communities where no education was even available to them. From so little they created this province and communities that have left us with so much.

How do we leave our children a legacy that is as generous and hopeful as the legacy we inherited from generations that had so little? What do we, the healthiest, most educated, most tech-savvy generation in Canadian history, leave our children?

Other countries—Japan and Germany—have already adopted early childhood education as a foundation of their economic development strategies. One might ask why most other progressive, knowledge-based economies and countries are making these kinds of investments and expanding them even when their governments face deficits and challenges.

Between Canada and the United States in the last 10 years, there have been over 130 studies done on the benefits of early childhood education. In a survey, Rutgers University came to one conclusion: "Overall, looking across the entire research of literature over four decades ... preschool has substantial impacts on cognitive development, on social and emotional development, and on schooling outcomes."

It has been determined that this is one of the most important factors in the ability of children to succeed in elementary school and high school. It is one of biggest determinants of whether they will enter university.

So how can we not do this? How can we not do anything but this, unless we want to leave a very serious deficit for the future of our province and our country?

Right now in Ontario the manufacturing sector is shrinking, as it is across the entire industrial world. I've spent the last several years of my life working on economic development in many parts of the world. I cannot find a part of the world right now where high-value manufacturing jobs are not in decline. Right now, there is a collapse of the manufacturing economy in Poland. Why? Because in Bulgaria they're building plants that use 25% as many workers, are more highly automated and people work for less money. In the old soviet economies of Ukraine and Georgia, there are even more automated plants with even lower salary levels, and that's moving down the value chain. We're lucky that we have advanced manufacturing in the auto sector in Ontario, with Linamar and Magna, which are innovation-based manufacturers. But those are precious and much competed for.

The service sector has been averaging about a 20% increase in jobs over the last 10 years, but because of the policies of the McGuinty government, 80% of the new jobs in Ontario are coming from the knowledge sector: people who imagine, perform, create, research, develop and invent. We have been in good times, and now, coming out of it with a 5% annualized increase in GDP in Canada, are competing way ahead of every other regional economy I can find in the world in generating knowledge

jobs, not only to replace manufacturing jobs in this globally fractured and changing economy but to offer higher value jobs that offer people increasing incomes and more security.

Where do we go from here? What are the real opportunities that this legislation presents for us? The National Research Council in the United States did a study in July of last year looking at mathematics learning in early childhood education as a pathway toward excellence and equity. Many of you, I hope, are familiar with the work of the National Research Council in the United States. It has been commissioned under the last three Presidents to try to look at how the United States maintains pre-eminence in the knowledge economy. Do you know what they found? Their biggest recommendations were around early childhood education. They expected that we would be talking about massive investments in post-secondary education and research, but what they found is that at three, four and five years old, children are more numeric than literate; that the best time for children to learn the math and science skills they need to learn is before they get into the formal educational system. We, on this side of the House, understand that. We understand, as they do in Japan, Germany and other advanced economies that our children will be better at any mathematical-based job, from engineering to science to medicine, if we create this. Even though we think this is an essential requirement for a successful career in a knowledge economy, that that early entry is one of the most productive and useful investments we could make in our children—and it is fundamental that children, before they can make those choices, have the right not to have diminished expectations and not to be compromised, which is what happens if the state does not produce that institutional capacity so they can get that education.

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We're saying parents are important. Families make these choices, and we, as members of provincial Parliament, each have a responsibility to share this knowledge and this research with parents so they can make informed choices, so that their children will have better choices as they grow older.

The fact that we are leading this in Canada and we are leading this in North America right now is an extraordinary commitment, but it becomes rather remarkable when you're facing a deficit. You don't get out of serious economic challenges in the near term; you get out of them by making strategic, long-term decisions that look at the sustainability of our economy, that solve problems not by building the tax burden but in fact by building the tax base. We know that while investments in roads, bridges and transit are important, there's nothing more important to our social sustainability and our economic sustainability than the investments we make in our children.

When this comes to committee, I am going to be advocating that the next step we take is that we try to get the federal government, and certainly Ontario, to have a provincial strategy on early mathematical- and science-

based education, and that we take the learning of the National Research Council, even though it's just recently been released—less than 12 months—and we try to become the first jurisdiction in Canada to advance mathematics-based learning.

In spite of what people say, I'm actually the member for Toronto Centre. But I'm very proud that I have not lived my whole life in Toronto Centre. I love Sudbury. I spent a great many years in Sudbury with my family. I even lived in Winnipeg when I was the mayor. But one of the most fun things was when my father invested in a farm in Alexandria, in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, one of the greatest communities in this province, and I learned how to milk a cow. I dare say there aren't too many MPPs, although I know there are a few others, who know how to milk a cow. I actually learned something.

One of these 130-odd studies was done in the states of Georgia, Oklahoma and Florida. These studies were done in pre-kindergarten and universal pre-K programs over 30 years after they were introduced. While we have a province-wide economic strategy and while we are working with school boards and local authorities to make sure this isn't a one-size-fits-all, that it's got to meet community needs, this is one of the most important investments we will make in rural and small-town Ontario. Why is this even more important to small and rural communities than it is to big cities? Well, I'd like to tell you. The research in the United States found the following: Universal pre-K availability of preschool enrolment increased by 12% to 15%, with the largest effect on children of women with less than a bachelor's degree in rural communities. Women residing in rural areas increased their children's preschool enrolment and their own employment by 22% and 20% respectively when universal pre-K programs were introduced.

We know, whether we are talking about small communities around Brockville or we're talking about remote and northern resource communities, that one of the most undervalued and underpaid group of women are farm women and women who manage and work on farms. Anyone who has spent any time on a farm knows that those women should be sainted for the family and personal responsibilities that they bring to this community.

This is one of great things about being a Liberal: I have to run in Toronto Centre and stand up for farm women, and my friends who are farm women from rural Ontario stood up in this House and fought for some fairly fundamental human rights that allowed me to stand here today. I'm indebted to those women who have never blinked at a controversy or a challenge, and they deserve this.

If we can see the same experience that the Americans had on the lives of farm children and farm women in small communities, this will be one of those legacies that our generation leaves our children's generation in small communities; so important. While those of us in Toronto have less of a challenge attracting a creative and dynamic knowledge workforce and have a huge muscle of large universities, smaller communities are challenged.

Women play a definitive role in those communities, in making them work and in providing the leadership in family, farm and business to do that, and this is a vote of confidence in those women.

I have to apologize to our federal finance minister, Mr. Flaherty. I did take a little shot at him once when he said that the federal government would get out of its deficit within five years based on 3% growth. Actually, I have to eat some humble pie here. The projections are even ahead of what some of the most brilliant researchers have said; we had annualized growth of 5%.

I have to give our Premier some incredible credit. Being an cyclist and environmentalist, I was a little nervous about the kind of investments we were making in the auto sector, but you'll like to see that the growth is led by 11% growth in the auto sector. The last time I looked, having lived in certain other parts of the country, which I think is an advantage, not a deficit in my experience that I bring to this, is that there isn't a lot of auto sector in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Nova Scotia, which means that those investments are now paying dividends.

There was one concern that came up, because you can't just have only an education strategy. As the Premier often says somewhat gently, we have a plan and we're waiting for the other guys' plan.

One of the things that caused me a little concern was that business investment in plants and equipment all across Canada fell. When you look at the reasons why the HST has worked so well, there was an 11% increase in Nova Scotia—and the NDP there aren't even blinking about the HST—in investments in plants and production in Nova Scotia; an 11% jump. Darrell Dexter's government deserves some credit for that, and they're hanging on to that, even though they had to eat little humble pie and said maybe this HST thing wasn't quite what we thought it was.

The HST will de-layer taxation in the manufacturing sector. It will add \$8.5 billion to the capital available to small and large businesses in the auto sector. This is why people like Ken Lewenza have criticized some other parties in this House for anti-tax hysteria, because they understand, Jim Stafford understands, Jack Mintz understands, people who have looked at the economics.

This is important, because while we're making investments in mathematics, cultural-based, literary-based early education to improve skill sets, a lot of people are still going to want and need blue collar assembly jobs, and we aren't walking away from working people.

This tax reform is more important than subsidies or anything else, because it liberates private sector capital, which is why Mr. Flaherty, God bless him, supports the HST—because he represents the auto sector. You should talk to his cousins in Oshawa. This is the exact kind of tax reform, which is why 139 of 140 industrial and emerging industrial nations have already implemented this, because without it, we will never get the kind of liberated tax revenue in the private sector to get those kinds of capital investments if we maintain a tax system that is arcane, broken and for an economy of another day.

I want to sum up with this: If you start to look at the big picture, how do you liberate our young people's future? How do you make investments that are going to be transformational in the long term? You have to do early childhood education. You need Places to Grow. We've got to have better-quality urban environments that attract and retain a workforce. We've got to build transit and walkable neighbourhoods as we are with the Big Move. We've got to care about farm and rural communities and big cities and not play one against the other. We've got to invest in children in the longer term. We've got to make the tax reforms that liberate private capital to do the things that the public sector can't do, but if the public sector doesn't step up to the plate and take responsibility for the educational system, who will?

We're taking our responsibilities even in the face of a deficit because we agree with some of our friends in the federal Parliament that building the tax base is more important than building the tax burden. Building the tax base is a preferable way to get out of this challenge that we're facing on the deficit side, and we're doing that.

Thank you very much for the privilege of being able to speak here today.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I enjoyed listening to our new member from Ottawa Centre, I believe—

Interjections: Toronto Centre.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Toronto Centre; I'm sorry. I just came from Ottawa this morning. It is the centre of the universe; it's not Toronto or Winnipeg or anywhere else.

I listened with a great deal of concentration to the new member. He seems to have cottoned on to or adopted very quickly the government's mantra with regard to the HST. He drew an example of the province of Nova Scotia, telling how wonderful the story is in Nova Scotia. I might want to point out to him, though, that when Nova Scotia implemented the HST they took two points off their provincial sales tax, so that the net gain by the government was zero. In other words, the provincial government didn't receive any more cash or income from the combined tax as compared to when they had their own provincial sales tax.

This government is doing a very different formula. What they're going to end up with is \$3 billion-plus more out of the individuals' pockets in additional tax revenue in order to allay some of the concerns with business. There would be much less objection on my part if this was revenue-neutral to the consumer.

This member talked about the new education bill, which is going to benefit poor and moderate family income earners. This HST is going to act exactly in the opposite direction with regard to those very same people in our province. So on the one hand, he says the education bill is good for these people, but he then argues that the HST—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I listened with some care and attention to the member's speech, and I found it interesting that while we are supposed to be debating Bill 242, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, in fact a lot of the speech was dedicated to the HST. I found that very intriguing. I'm not sure what the connection is, but it seems to me that what people across Ontario want to know is how the government intends to pay for the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

It is one thing to announce full-day kindergarten in a few schools across the province where there are currently vacant classrooms, and therefore no capital costs associated with full-day kindergarten. It is quite another thing to add in full-day kindergarten where the physical facilities don't exist, where you don't have vacant classrooms and where you have to engage in rather substantial and significant capital costs in order to accommodate full-day kindergarten. I think these are some of the questions that school boards would like to have answered, that municipalities would like to have answered and that teachers and early childhood educators would like to have answered.

Frankly, I think all of us as members need to have answers to this; otherwise, we're going to end up in a situation where some communities have full-day kindergarten and other communities do without.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kuldip Kular: I'm pleased to participate in the debate on Bill 242. If passed, this bill is basically focusing on early development of our students. By doing that, we are giving them a better chance of finishing high school, going on to post-secondary education and getting better jobs.

In my own riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton, the following schools got to have this early learning program for four- and five-year-olds: Holy Cross Separate School, Brandon Gate Public School and Marvin Heights Public School. Even in Brampton some other schools got it; their names are Georges Vanier Catholic School, Hanover Public School, Massey Street Public School and Thorndale Public School.

Let me quote what the Peel region's school board chair said about this program. "We all know the value of early learning—the sooner we can have education play a key role in the life of a child, the greater the positive impact on that life. We applaud the move by the province to implement a program that not only parents in Peel want, but a program that children in Peel need," said Janet McDougald, chair of the Peel District School Board.

Obviously, this is going to help our students, our parents and our teachers, so I fully support this program and the bill which is going to bring our four- and five-year-olds early learning.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to reply to the member for Toronto Centre with respect to his presentation this afternoon on Bill 242. As has been pointed out already, he focused on a number of issues beyond the scope of Bill 242, talking about the HST and some of the other issues that he's interested in.

When I look at Bill 242 and I listen to the rhetoric of the government, it would appear that the government is endeavouring to demonstrate its commitment to children and children's services in the broadest sense. If you look at what's happening with our children's aid societies—and I know that this issue has been brought up in the Legislature in the last few weeks and months—there are a lot of serious funding issues facing our children's aid societies.

I have information from the Halton Children's Aid Society that I think is important and that people need to understand in this House. Halton receives the lowest per capita child funding in the province; it receives \$194.62 per child, well below the provincial average of \$458.16, well below the provincial average in most funding factors, 11 out of 15. If it was funded at the provincial average, our funding eligibility would increase by \$1.1 million.

There are serious concerns about the viability of these agencies with respect to funding, and I think the government has made some effort to address them, although I don't think it has been enough. Certainly what I have heard from the children's aid society in Guelph and Wellington—actually, the official name is the Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County—is that this additional funding the government boasted about a few weeks ago is totally insufficient. In 2008-09, the agency received \$20.6 million. This year, in 2009-10, they will receive \$19.8 million, which is really a cut in their funding grant even though their caseload has gone up.

These are issues that the government needs to address as well during the course of this debate and in the days that follow. I would encourage the government to look at the priorities and make sure that our children's aid societies are adequately funded.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Toronto Centre, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: I gotta tell you I'm a little confused; maybe it's just because I'm new. I've heard my friends in the New Democratic Party and Conservative Party, who I have a great deal of respect for. These are very smart people who care deeply about this province.

But they've challenged us, on one hand, that we don't have a plan. When you actually go to our party's website, which I'm sure they visit from time to time, we've identified two big challenges facing our economy. One of them is to create the tax environment for reinvestment, restoration and modernization of capital manufacturing plants and facilities, because that's one essential building block in rebuilding our economy and renewing it for the

future in the new century—and reinvesting in our children, for which we've add 9,000 teachers, major investments in public education across the board and early childhood education. The difference is that we understand the relationship, that you've got to do both these things and that this is part of a plan. Doing one without the other would be a loss.

1700

I am perplexed how just about every OECD country of consequence is pursuing these policies, that New Democratic governments in Manitoba and Nova Scotia are pursuing these policies—the federal Conservative Party, when I was an advisor to John Baird, believed in this kind of tax reform and education reform. It seems that we have some lonely friends in opposition who not only don't believe in these things, they don't understand the critical relationship to them. You cannot have the public sector rebuild and modernize technology in the manufacturing sector. You create the tax environment to incent them to do that. And the tax record, when you look at the research—I challenge any member in this House to produce credible research that says this kind of—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

I'll just take a moment to allay some of the fears a couple of members expressed. It was the Chair's understanding that this was a maiden speech, and you know that there's a great deal of latitude given when maiden speeches are given, so they can talk about family and the communities they've lived in and a whole range of things. I was listening very carefully, though.

Further debate.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I enjoyed the member's maiden speech. I found myself agreeing with him on some of his economic thoughts that he was talking about, and that shocked me. Then when he mentioned that he had worked with John Baird, everything became clear, and I found out that he was—

Interjections.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: —I had some inkling of where that knowledge came from.

Talking about Bill 242 and early childhood education, one of the major things that is of great concern to me—and I do like the concept of the bill; I think the timing of the bill is a little iffy—is the \$1.5 billion that this is going to cost the people of Ontario. It's going to cost the people of Ontario \$1.5 billion at a time in our economy when we are just beginning to crawl out of a significant recession. Of course, when you pull money out of the economy in the form of tax revenues, that slows down the recovery and could indeed stall the recovery.

The \$1.5 billion that this program is estimated to cost also doesn't include the physical space that may be required. Every elementary school in Ontario that takes on this program is going to need additional space, and that space, of course, costs money to produce and also takes time. So one of the problems is the space problem.

The consequences of this move perhaps haven't been thought through by the government in as much detail as I

would like to think that a government bringing in a major policy change in early childhood education would have given this kind of initiative. What are the consequences to all of the daycare centres that currently exist in the province of Ontario? What are the consequences to all the physical space that those daycares use, much of it in our churches throughout Ontario? Lord knows—no pun intended—the churches are having a difficult time making ends meet at this point in time in our economy, and here is a revenue generator, or a revenue offsetter, in some cases, in non-profit cases, that the churches are going to lose, or lose some portion of, because the government, in their early childhood education, is coming in to take up that portion of their revenue. I think that is something the government should think about as to the consequences of what they're doing.

The other one is the consequences of the effect this is going to have on early childhood education in grades 1, 2 and 3. One of the promises of the government in getting elected in the last election was a hard cap on class sizes of 20. The effect of this is going to raise the class size to 26, I believe. I think it's going to be a soft cap as well, which means that you can have an average of 26 students in your class—some classes may have 30 and others may have 24—but it will not be a hard cap with none over 26. Of course, the hard cap of 20 never really came to that. There were all kinds of classes in grades 1, 2 and 3 across Ontario that had more than 20 students in them. The average might have been close to 20—in some cases, it was above; in some cases, it was below—but it was never exactly on that 20 or below.

I think some of these things are difficult because I don't think that the government has thought through the consequences of where these students are going to physically sit, as far as the space is concerned, and where the cost is going to escalate to. One point five billion dollars is an estimate, and I don't know what percentage of the students in junior kindergarten and kindergarten the \$1.5 billion takes care of. I don't think we can implement the entire program. I don't think it's proposed to implement the entire program in one year. It's to be phased in.

Of course, some taxpayers in Ontario will get the benefit of their children going to junior kindergarten on a full-day program, and they won't have to pay daycare at \$125 or more a week. They won't have to pay that because that will come out of the school budget. If some parents get that bonus and others don't, that creates a very unfair situation in Ontario where you have a group of haves and you have a group of have-nots, and they're all paying the same amount of taxes. To me, that is terribly unfair. I would propose a solution to the government, if they would look at it, that for those students who could not get into a full-day junior kindergarten or kindergarten program, the government could hand out a voucher for the students who couldn't get in. That would make it far more equitable across the province. Otherwise, there are going to be people who are very upset and consider themselves to be disenfranchised when it comes to getting early childhood education with their children.

This program also does not allow for junior kindergarten—once the school is involved in this program, I don't believe that the program has the flexibility to allow a parent to opt for a half-day program. You're either in the one-day program or you're out, and the half-day program isn't an option. Many parents in today's society work split shifts or work at different times of the day. Quite often, they're home in the morning or they're home in the afternoon, and they could have their children with them in these very formative years. I always think it's a wonderful thing to increase the amount of time that parents spend with their children, especially in those younger years under six years old. I think those are the years that are very formative in the creation of values that a child takes on, and it's a very valuable thing to have those values come from their parents as opposed to an organization such as the board of education or a school system. I think the time that you spend with your parents in those years is a very valuable thing that makes for a much better citizen in the years ahead as he develops into a mature student and then a mature adult.

1710

There's been much criticism of this program around the province. There have been many school boards—school trustees themselves are calling this “one of the most ill-conceived and badly thought-through programs the province has ever announced.” That was from Irene Atkinson, Toronto District School Board.

Again, it appears to me that the government hasn't thought through the consequences, the financial, the physical space, the impact on families, the impact on people who are currently supplying the daycare needs of those students in Ontario today, and not thought through all of the various aspects and the effects that this program is going to have on parents and students, space and other people who are involved in the daycare system. That's too bad.

I think if they had hearings on this bill, we would find that there would be an awful lot of people in the province of Ontario who are very, very concerned about the direction that this is taking us, in particular at this time in the very infant stages of the beginnings of a financial recovery, an economic recovery in the province of Ontario. It's a very delicate point in time when we begin the recovery financially in a province coming out of a recession. As you may remember, in the early 1990s the NDP were coming out of the recession, they didn't do a very good job of coming out of that recession, and Ontario stayed in recession for some period of time afterwards. When the rest of Canada had emerged from the recession, Ontario was still in it. So I would like the government to think through the consequences of this bill a little more carefully.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: The concept of this bill is really very simple. We don't have people in Ontario to waste. Those early learning years are ones that make a big difference not merely in the years that you're actually

getting your education in the classroom setting with an ECE instructor and with a teacher, but those years come back to benefit you enormously as you get into high school and university and even your graduate school years. These precious early years are what make an average student a good student, a good student an exceptional student and an exceptional student a world-class student.

India outnumbers Ontario about 85 to one. China outnumbers Ontario 100 to one. China is no longer red. India's no longer Third World. Brazil outnumbers Ontario 15 to one. All of these places, plus places like Russia, want what we have. One of the things that differentiates us from them is the fact that we put our effort into making sure that our number one asset, which is the minds of the people who create the value that companies come to Ontario to get, is the best in the world.

We don't want to see any prospect of having lost an exceptional mind. This proposal, this bill, enables Ontario to take its best minds at the earliest age we can get them into school and get them accustomed to a lifetime of learning, that lifetime of learning being the difference between someone who might not make it and someone who will make it, contribute and be a world leader, a business creator, an employer, a good employee and someone who, in the long term, will pay his taxes and contribute to the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'm pleased to support the member for Halton in some of the concerns that he raises with regard to this bill, one being the cost. The cost, as told by the government of \$1.5 billion to cover only a part of the population across the province of Ontario when we have a deficit of \$25 billion—an economic concern. But the more important concern for me is the inequality that this bill will bring upon the citizens of the province of Ontario. How can you say to one parent, “Your child is going to have an advantage while the other doesn't”?

The previous speaker mentioned China and the differences that we have with China. One of the great differences that we have in the province of Ontario, in Canada, is that each child can get an education. That's not true, even in today's China, that children can get an education there without paying. Most children, or parents of children still pay for education in China in order to gain an education in that country.

I have in Almonte a public elementary school and a Catholic elementary school across from each other. The Catholic elementary school is going to offer this program, whereas the public school is not. Guess what's happening in that community? It's fracturing apart because the parents of public education students are now registering them in the Catholic system.

You cannot introduce a program where there are some winners and there are some losers. Introduce a program where everybody can be a winner, to a certain extent, even if it can't be as thorough and wide as the program that they're putting forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I listened very carefully to my Conservative colleague's speech. I want to say to him that while I disagree with him fundamentally on the issue of vouchers, I think he's quite accurate to raise a number of questions about how the government proposes to do this, about the equity and the evenness of it. But putting vouchers into the equation is simply going to raise more questions. So I would say to him that I fundamentally disagree with him on that.

This is important social policy, and if you're going to implement important social policy, it is important to do it right. If you have, in some schools, a program that is going to be offered, but on the other side of the community the program is not going to be offered, given the history of some of the differences that we've had between the Catholic separate school system and the public system in this province, where you further have those kinds of delinkages, this has the potential to create problems rather than move us ahead.

Similarly, I think one of the questions this government has to answer is this: It is relatively easy to put in full-day kindergarten in a school that has vacant classrooms, but what do you do in the hundreds of elementary schools that do not have vacant classrooms? Where is the capital budget to then construct those classrooms? And if you don't have an answer to that equation, you get more of the inequality, more of the inequity that you want to avoid if you're implementing good social policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen very carefully to the comments from my colleague from Halton. I must say that my brother and sister-in-law, Doug and Jane Leal, live in Milton. They moved to Milton in 1973 when it was that quaint little village of about 14,000 people.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Who'd they vote for?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I don't know. I chat with them from time to time. I don't know who they vote for.

But I must say, when we announced this initiative in Peterborough, we did quite a bit of consultation with Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington separate school board and Kawartha Pine Ridge. We selected three schools: St. Paul's, Prince of Wales Public School in the city of Peterborough and one in the far eastern part of my riding, Havelock public school. When they did that consultation and made those choices, they spread them apart so there wouldn't be this sort of internal competition within the community. Prince of Wales Public School is one in the downtown core of Peterborough, and the city of Peterborough has created a community hub at Prince of Wales Public School, so this initiative, this full-day kindergarten, will certainly assist the city of Peterborough in meeting that goal of creating that community hub in the downtown core. In the far eastern part of my riding is Havelock public school. There have been, over the years, some economic challenges in that area, and we see the introduction of

full-day kindergarten in that particular community as a real opportunity for community revival and the rejuvenation of that area of my riding. At St. Paul's separate school—again, it's further away from Prince of Wales, so we won't have that internal competition.

One of the experts I always rely upon when it comes to full-day kindergarten is my wonderful wife, Karan, who is a vice-principal at St. Anne's in Peterborough, and she certainly sees this as a very positive initiative for our school system in Ontario.

1720

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Halton, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I want to reassure my friend from the third party that I was not advocating for a voucher system. I was merely pointing out that the system the Liberals are introducing has this tremendous inequity and that that would be one way to solve it. I think that the distaste, perhaps, for the voucher system would only emphasize the fact that they do have a problem over there, and it's of the magnitude that that system would solve the inequity issue. I don't think for a moment that they're going there.

To the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, thank you very much for your comments. I would agree that much of the world wants to have our system and wants to have what we have; the cargo, as it's called in *Guns, Germs and Steel*. In large part, we have it because of our educational system. I would argue that the education on the other end, in the post-high school period, is where we would get the biggest bang for our buck, as opposed to early childhood education. If we were going to put that kind of money into our college and university systems, I think we would get far more economic stimulus out of our province there than in early childhood education. Not that early childhood education isn't important as well, but if we were doing a study on which ones would have the greatest effect, I'm pretty confident that it would be post-secondary.

Certainly, the issue that was brought up by the member from Carleton—Mississippi Mills, the creating of haves and have-nots in our various school boards and various communities, is a very important one that the government should have a close look at.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments on this legislation, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act. Let me first of all say that I think the evidence is very clear that children benefit overwhelmingly from quality early childhood programs. I don't think there's any debate over that. There has been study after study here in Ontario, in other provinces, in the United States and in other countries which demonstrate that ensuring children have access to quality early childhood education helps them in terms of their social development, their

educational development and their psychological development. It helps them in so many ways.

They demonstrate that in fact investments in early childhood education actually save us money down the road. They save us money in terms of the ongoing costs of the education system. They save us money in terms of fewer incidences of young people interacting with the criminal justice system. They save us money because of the potential for increased educational achievement and increased employment potential later on in life. So I don't think there's any debate about that. This is something that needs to be done, and it needs to be done soon.

The issues really with this bill are, first of all, how long this is going to take. Now, the government talks in terms of a five-year plan, but you only need to look at the fine print to see that this is going to take much longer than five years when you get into actually having to construct the classrooms, and there will have to be significant classroom construction in many parts of the province. That by its very nature stretches things out by at least a couple, if not more, years. So the question then is, where is the fairness, the equality, the equity, when some under the government's own plan will have to wait in excess of five years to see any movement? Where is the fairness in that?

The second issue: Again, this is an issue which boards of education themselves have raised. For example, the Toronto District School Board has said very clearly that they are concerned about whether the funding that the government has outlined is adequate to do the job. Once again, it is fine to make an announcement, but when you're dealing with really important social policy that can have all kinds of implications for different communities and different parts of province, one of questions you need to ask and you need to very clearly answer is, will there be adequate funding? You have very reputable school boards now saying they doubt that there's equitable funding.

Indeed, at the same time that the Toronto District School Board asks the question about equitable funding, that board is very worried that they're going to have to make further cuts to special education budgets, and that has been raised by a number of school boards. In order to do this initiative and do it right, is it going to mean cuts to other educational programs? And if that's the case, I would suggest to you that where we already have a system where one envelope of the public school budget is raided this year to pay for something that was underfunded and something else is raided the next year to pay for another envelope that is underfunded, this doesn't move us ahead in the way that we need to move.

Another issue that has been raised, and this has been raised by people who already work in child care: In the implementation of this policy there needs to be care taken to ensure that the existing child care system is not disrupted, cut, or otherwise, in many instances, child care centres will be forced to close. First in Toronto, now in Windsor, we're already seeing very real concerns raised

about that, that if you take four- and five-year-olds out of the existing child care centres and put them into schools, where does the funding come from to continue to operate the child care centre that was pre-existing? Parents will no longer be paying fees to that child care centre; they've moved their children on. So where does the funding come from to ensure that the existing child care centres can continue to operate and continue to provide the much-needed services? How much are these services needed? Go to any community in this province and see the existing wait-list, parents who want to get their children into good-quality child care programs and can't because the spaces are already filled and there isn't funding available for more spaces to be accommodated. I think the government has to answer that question.

A question I've asked already, again, but which needs to be answered, and for which this government has not provided any answers: It is very easy to announce four-year-old and five-year-old full-day kindergarten in this school, which has vacant classrooms. It is easy to announce it in this school, which has vacant classrooms. But what about these schools over here, which do not have any vacant classrooms? Where is the physical space going to come from to accommodate four- and five-year-olds in that part of the region, in that part of the city, in that part of the town? As far as we could see, there are no capital allocations. When you start building classrooms, it becomes a very expensive undertaking indeed, which opens up the question: Are we going to see full, all-day kindergarten where it is needed, or are we only going to see it where there happens to be vacant space in existing schools? If that is where we're headed, and it certainly seems at the outset that that is where we're headed, then that creates a very unfair and inequitable system.

1730

In the very parts of, for example, the city of Toronto, where children might benefit the most from full-day kindergarten, it will not be available. In other communities—and I want to thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for pointing this out—one of the places where we probably need full-day kindergarten the most is in schools where you have a lot of aboriginal children, because, in many cases, coming from very low-income families, families that are struggling to find a place in the local economy, families that are challenged by other issues, full-day kindergarten would make a great difference there.

But if full-day kindergarten is not going to happen where children need it the most, then this doesn't resolve the inequality and the unfairness. In fact, it fans the flames of greater inequality and greater unfairness. These are the questions the government needs to answer. I listened to people from the government stand up and speak, and they, oh, so deliberately avoid answering any of these questions. But these are the real nuts and bolts of good social policy. How is this going to be implemented? How is it going to be implemented fairly? How is it going to be implemented equitably? How are we going to ensure that the kids who need it the most don't have to wait the longest?

As I listened to government speaker after government speaker, they, oh, so deliberately avoid answering any of those questions. It's very clear. The evidence is in. This kind of initiative is good social policy, but if you haven't thought through the details about how to do it fairly and equitably and in a balanced way, if you haven't thought through the details about how you do it without closing down, cutting or otherwise undermining the existing child care centres, then it's very likely not a step ahead, but creates more problems.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for—are you in your proper seat?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That's what caught me short. The member for Ajax-Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I thought it was the glasses.

I'd like to acknowledge and thank the speaker from Kenora-Rainy River. I'm very pleased to hear his comments, in particular one of his initial quotes: "This needs to be done." It's certainly a pleasure to have him onside with us. Some of his other questions are legitimate: "How long will it take?" We say five years. We're not 100% sure, but it's all dependent, of course, on a number of circumstances.

I have to tell you that I was born with the best of both worlds. My mother graduated and became a teacher. This is for you who are too young to realize, but in those days it was called normal school. The other best part of being there was that I was the eldest of 10 children. I saw all my brothers and sisters grow up, I saw what my mother went through, and I know her comments. Her comments were, "Just to have one extra year for a child at the beginning of their school life would give my children a head start." She's right. It's coming to fruition a half a century later. The comments that we are sharing here today—and everybody has said it: Investing in early learning is good for children, good for parents, and good for Ontario.

I have to tell you I love a couple of the comments, one from the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario: "We commend the government for its commitment to the welfare of our young children. The decision took a lot of courage in today's economic environment, but it will pay a lifetime of rewards, not only for our children, but for our communities and the economy."

My compliments once more to the past third party leader—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to commend the member from Kenora-Rainy River on a number of the points he raised. As we've said before, we support in principle this program. Some of the issues that he identified are concerns that we have as far as the haves and the have-nots in some of the same districts. I know in mine there are four schools that are going to provide this in Sarnia-Lambton, yet there's a number of other schools that

won't be able to take advantage of this. Those are concerns of ours. There's also, the funding model—we'll have to see if that's going to work—the provision of space, the opportunities for the schools and parents to access this.

I've got two grandchildren myself. I know I look too young for that, but I've got two grandchildren myself who are in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten at this time. I know that when our children were growing up, it would probably have been quite a relief, for my wife anyway, to have had an opportunity to put our children into something similar to this.

But I've got concerns, as the member from Kenora-Rainy River and a number of other members have spoken about, about access and the people who aren't able to access this, maybe on the opposite side of the street. Just because of where they live and geography, they're not going to be able to take part in this. Those are valid concerns, I think. Hopefully, if we can take something like this to committee and try to make the bill better—I see my honourable friend from Peterborough nodding his head. I think that's reassuring.

Anyway, we look forward to that and also to the rest of the debate today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to pick up on the comments made by my friendly member from Kenora-Rainy River. He's right picking up on the fact that it's a good policy. Nobody's arguing about the direction and what the government is doing. It's a question of, how are we going to make sure that this policy applies to as many Ontario citizens as possible?

One of those issues is, how does this relate to First Nations kids? The reality is, it's not going to apply to First Nations kids in 99% of the cases because most of those kids are inside a federal education system that doesn't afford junior kindergarten. That's why I've always favoured the issue of getting into discussions about how we're able to create aboriginal school boards and transfer education from the federal to the provincial jurisdiction when it comes to First Nations. I think it's pretty discouraging for kids and their parents when they see a child in a provincial system who gets \$12,000-plus per annum, the amount of money per year to pay for that education in the provincial system, and you get less than half of that in the federal system. I think we need to be able to deal with that.

The other issue that he raised is the issue around daycare, and that is a really serious issue. I wish that the government would pay a little bit more attention on this one because you have a lot of not-for-profit daycare centres, and some for-profit centres, that are going to find themselves in the position of trying to figure out how they're going to balance the books at year end, because a lot of kids that they've presently got in the daycare system are kids who are going to end up in the junior kindergarten system. Should that be a reason not to do this? Absolutely not. It's something we've got to do. But

I think the government needs to approach this in a much more global way and take a look at the issues around how we make sure that this policy is not going to negatively affect daycares and other people who are in contact with their kids in the education system.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Mauro: If I could, I'll make my comments in these two minutes by way of example of, I think, one of the reasons why we as Liberals in the province of Ontario are so very proud of this particular policy and the \$1.5-million commitment that we're making to it and to the 35,000 children who are going to have access to this program come intake this fall 2010.

If you think about it, governments of all stripes—senior levels, federally, provincially, even municipally—are not, I would suggest, well known for making investments in policy decisions the benefits of which will not accrue until five, 10 or 20 years down the road, health care probably being the best example of that.

1740

I could give a lot of examples of things that we've done on health care in the province of Ontario in the seven years since I've been here that are wonderful examples of us taking money when resources are tight and putting it on the front end of the health care system to try and prevent illness, for example, HPV vaccine for young girls, saving families \$550 per year; a colorectal screening cancer program—great examples of how we take resources and put them in on the front end. The benefits of that may not be seen. They're harder to quantify.

But when it comes to this particular policy in education, I would make the same argument. I think that's why we can be extremely proud of it. It would have been extremely easy for the Premier and our government to walk away from this particular commitment because the benefits of this to these 35,000 kids starting this fall—it's going to be 10, 15, 20 years out before we see the benefits of what we have done here: the higher graduation rates from high school, more kids attending post-secondary education and more kids achieving success educationally and in the workforce on a go-forward basis. We're not really going to see and feel that for 10 or 20 years, but I think as a government we can be extremely proud of this policy. It would have been very easy not to do it now, but I think this is a very clear signal from our government and from our Premier on how important we see this particular piece.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Kenora-Rainy River, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to thank members for their comments, but I want to use this opportunity to again illustrate one of the questions that is being asked and needs to be answered.

This came up recently at a child care forum here in Toronto where the very child care advocates who have worked the longest and the hardest to promote the idea of

full-day early childhood education are now raising the issue that the government intends to water down the rules and regulations for the operation of child care centres.

At the same time that some schools receive full-day kindergarten, child care centres, which look after not only at this time four- and five-year-olds but younger children, and where there's a considerable amount of evidence as to the number of early childhood educators there should be per child, the government is seriously looking at watering down those standards such that the quality of child care that children receive is thereby diminished.

I would just say that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if that's where the government is headed, you water down the standards for early child care, for early childhood education and then, on the other hand of the stick, say, "Oh, but some schools are going to have full-day child care," that's not going to be a step ahead. That will be taking from some children in order to potentially benefit other children, but it doesn't make for good social policy and it doesn't make for good outcomes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm delighted to be able to speak in support of Bill 242 and full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds and thought maybe I'd start with a little bit about why. This is Carl Corter, who's the Atkinson Charitable Foundation chair in Early Childhood Development and Education, and this is what he had to say: "More than a decade of solid research at home and abroad shows the benefits" of early learning "for children's learning and development, and social savings on prevention. Healthier, better educated children are the best social and economic investment we can make, now more than ever."

To put it briefly, what we are doing here is something that is good for children, good for families in terms of their individual development and something that is good for our economy in terms of skills development and economic development. My colleague from Toronto Centre spoke very eloquently about the economic benefits of this.

I think that I will spend a little bit more time talking about the implementation and what the program's going to look at. I've been quite fascinated listening today to the somewhat manufactured angst we've been hearing about the equity of all this. If we could put things in a little bit of perspective, to phase in part-time junior kindergarten took about two decades, 20 years, during which the two opposition parties were, for the most part, the government of the province, and they took a very laissez-faire approach: "Oh, when you get around to it. Whatever. If you want to."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's stretching it.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I will give you some credit. The NDP was a little bit more aggressive than the Conservatives.

It was a 20-year process. So to complain because we have 2015-16 as a target for this massive program is just plain disingenuous on the part of the opposition parties.

Let's talk about the phase-in, because the phase-in is a legitimate issue. How are we going to handle this? We do know, as has been mentioned, that schools come, from a physical state, in three categories: They already have room; or they have some classrooms, but they're not appropriate for four- and five-year-olds so they need renovations; or they just plain need an addition. What we are doing right now is working with the school boards to identify which schools are which—which ones are good to go in terms of space, which ones need renovations, which ones need additions. The reason you don't see the capital dollars sitting there as a laid-out program is because we are discussing with the school boards how we are going to phase in the capital needs on this. We quite admit there are capital needs, and those capital needs will be taken care of.

The second issue I've heard a lot about is the whole issue of child care. We also understand that we will have some impact on child care. First of all, I think we do need to look at this from the perspective of families. From the perspective of a family, what this means is that if you have a four- or five-year-old, the child will be able to go to school all day, every day, and schools will offer, on a fee-for-service basis, before-school and after-school child care in JK or SK in the full-day-learning program classroom. So from the parent's point of view and the child's point of view, we are dramatically improving service to the families of young children. From the child care point of view, that does mean they're going to eventually have less four- and five-year-olds in child care, but what that also means is there will be more space for two- and three-year-olds in child care. That's a good thing, not a bad thing. What it does mean is that we need to work with our child care operators to figure out how to make that transition. That's why we said to the boards this year, "Don't implement it in a school where there's child care, because we know we need to work around the issues with how that's going work."

So, in fact, we do have a plan to phase this in carefully, and we do have a plan to address exactly those issues which the opposition has raised.

Let's talk a little bit about the model that's going to happen here. In my view, this is an absolutely brilliant model. What we're going to have in each full-day learning classroom is a teacher who is qualified to teach small children, primary children, who is going to be able to take the lead on matters academic. But what we're also going to have in every full-day-learning classroom is an early childhood educator who is specifically educated around issues of early childhood development—what does a four-year-old's and a five-year-old's social development look like? How do you take advantage of play experiences to reinforce the learning experiences that the teacher can set up? It's a wonderful model. You're getting the best of two professions working together to have a marvellous program for small children.

What that means is that, yes, we may have more children in each classroom—we've said a maximum of 26—but there will be two adults in each of those classrooms. So for every 13 children, there will be one fully qualified adult—the two adults working together to create the best program possible. Then, before and after hours, we can have the early childhood educator working, where required, to provide the actual child care program. So I would suggest that, again, the suggestion that somehow we're raising the class size from 20 to 26 is just silly. No, we're not. We're taking four- and five-year-olds who are currently in classes of 20 and we're going to put them in classes where there will be 13 kids for one adult.

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Now, I've heard some people, particularly from the Conservative Party, expressing concern: "How on earth are we going to manage these little four-year-olds at school all day?" Isn't this an awful thing? You know I've got white hair. My son is 35 years old, so it was 30 years ago when he went to kindergarten. Do you know how he went to kindergarten? He went to full-day alternate days. He went Monday, Wednesday and alternate Fridays, and complained bitterly on Tuesday and Thursday when he couldn't go to school. School boards have well over 30 years experience with having five-year-olds all day.

As I mentioned, it took 20 years to implement half-day JK. It's the same thing with JK: For school boards that have busing and for schools that have kids on buses, the four-year-olds are already going full-day alternate days. We have 20 years of experience in this province with having four-year-olds at school all day, just all-day alternate days.

My grandson, who happens to be four, goes to school Tuesday, Thursday and alternate Fridays. He's very fortunate because there's actually child care in his school, so on Wednesdays he goes to child care at the same school.

We have a lot of experience with these program models; we just need to get them implemented all over the province. Yes, that is going to be complicated, and we're going to take five or six years, and we're going to get it done very well and very carefully. It will be wonderful for kids, wonderful for families and wonderful for the economy.

What the actual legislation does is it sets up the legislation to allow school boards to set up this staffing model. It allows school boards to offer child care, which currently they are not allowed to do, for the extended day places. It sets up the working relationship between the teacher and the ECEs so that they have a collaborative relationship. It sorts out the details. But I am very, very proud that our government, despite the economic situation in which we find ourselves, recognizes that this is of huge social importance, and we are moving forward in a cautious but planned manner to help the families of this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to rise in this House to speak on Bill 242, full-day learning. At the outset I would like to commend the Minister of Education, our government and also our Premier for his initiative on this very issue: education, full-day learning for our four- and five-year-olds.

Education is the key for the success of every society. As an educator myself, also as a father and as a grandfather of two lovely girls, I realize and I know that education, particularly early childhood education, is the key; it's important. My wife also works—she is an economist, but she works as a supply teacher in one of the daycares in Richmond Hill. I learn a lot from her and her experience in dealing with kids.

In this world, we know that the economy is moving toward a knowledge-based economy, and we need to educate our kids right from day one, when they are born. Education actually starts at the same moment as a person is born, not at the age of six, not at the age of seven, not at the age of four or five. In reality, education starts at the same moment that a person is born. If you can afford education right at that moment, even better. But practically at this point, we can afford to provide full-day learning for four- and five-year-old kids. That's what our government is doing, and that's why our Minister of Education has brought Bill 242 to the House for consideration. If it passes, it's going to bring public education to our four- and five-year-old kids, and this is going to be paid off in the long term, though it's going to cost money, of course—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

My apologies. We'll get back in order now. The member for Oshawa.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: The member from Guelph mentioned that the “capital needs will be taken care of”—that was the specific quote. I have to say that, as an MPP, usually we get pressures in certain areas to try to deal with issues. I don't recall any major pressure coming forward, especially in these economic times right now—the added funds in revenue that will be taking place to implement the program over a period of time. We understand what's coming forward regarding the benefit. However, in economic times like this, is this the right time to be moving forward with this?

The impacts are going to be far greater than what's being mentioned here, for example, when you talk about it being implemented this fall. Those kids now—and we are getting calls from individuals, “How do we get them to school?”—they will be moved to other schools to fill those vacant spaces. What's going to happen to those kids when they get to grade 1? Do they move out of that school now and go back into their other school? What will take place at that particular time with those individuals?

Not only that, but when you talk about the impact on the daycares and what's going to happen there, as it stands right now, the kids of that age group are the ones essentially a lot of daycares are making their revenues from. Those are the easier kids to take care of. When

you're driving by and see these places advertising that they have so many kids available this age, so many available this age and so many kids available this age, what's taking place now is that we're going to eliminate that pocket of individuals at the daycare which are easier kids to take care of—cost-wise as well. We can expect that those other kids will now increase the cost for the lost revenues.

Not only that, I had a meeting with the faith council on Thursday, and I was quite surprised. They were actually very concerned about this because of the impact on their churches. In this particular case, it was two churches that spoke. They were going to lose, effectively, their daycare and the ability to come forward with what they were teaching those kids in those schools.

There are a lot of other aspects that need to come forward, and I hope I get a chance to talk about it at a later date.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I was pleased to hear the former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education speak on this bill because there were a few things that I was hoping she would raise. Most important to me was this change that is going to take place with the number of children in a classroom. Currently, of course, we are supposed to have 20 children per teacher up to grade 3. With the implementation of full-day kindergarten, that number is now changing upwards to 26. Again, that will depend, of course, on the school, because you can always ask for exemptions.

I think it's unfortunate that the former parliamentary assistant wouldn't at least try to explain that sudden backtracking. Limiting the number of children in the school age group down to 20 per teacher was, of course, a Dalton McGuinty promise. What we're seeing now with the new implementation of full-day kindergarten is that that promise will have to be—how shall we say?—rescinded. It would have been nice for the parliamentary assistant to raise that.

I think what we are seeing in the debate that has been occurring for the last number of hours on all-day kindergarten is that there are more questions being raised with the implementation of this proposed legislation than answers. We had a beautiful opportunity this afternoon with the former parliamentary assistant to answer some of the questions that have been raised in the last three hours of debate; instead, we didn't get any of that. I think it's a terrible missed opportunity that could have been used very effectively in this afternoon's debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Back in the nick of time, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We have it all sorted out now.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Back in the nick of time.

I have just a couple of very quick questions to the former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education. There are, I think, some legitimate concerns. I

believe this is something that should happen. We believe that a speedy process is a good thing. It pays dividends when it comes to kids in the longer term, as far as investment. We buy all that. But there are a couple of legitimate concerns that need to be answered. One is: What about those school boards which already offer this service and have been doing it for years? For example, where I come from, I'm pretty sure most of our school boards have been doing full-time JK for some time now. It started with the French Catholic, and as a result of that the other school boards followed through. What happens to them? Are they going to be compensated and not fall behind other schools when we fully implement junior kindergarten for all?

The other issue is, how do we deal with those daycares? I don't want to argue that every daycare in Ontario is going to be affected, but certain daycare centres are going to have bigger problems than others. What do you do in those daycare centres where a sufficient number of kids who would normally be in junior kindergarten—where they rightfully belong—leave, and end up in junior kindergarten rather than in their daycare centre? How do we deal with that, and what are the responses from the government when it comes to the overall daycare policy part of this that is not being spoken to?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Guelph, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the members from Richmond Hill, Oshawa, Dufferin-Caledon and Timmins-James Bay for their comments. I want to start with the comments of the member from Dufferin-Caledon, so let's go through this one more time.

Currently, if you are in a primary class, which would be junior kindergarten, kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2 or grade 3, the class size which is required by and paid for by the provincial government is 20 kids for one teacher, okay? Yes, we are going back on that for JK and SK. We are making it better, because there will be only 13 kids for each adult. It's just that we will have two adults who have slightly different qualifications, each very appropriate to deal with four- and five-year-olds. We will have one teacher who is qualified to teach primary children and one early childhood educator, also qualified to teach four- and five-year-olds. So we will have two qualified people in a classroom of a maximum of 26; two qualified educators. Now, 26 divided by two is 13, so the ratio will be 13 to 1. That's better than 20 to 1. We're making this better.

I did want to work through that in a lot of detail, because it seems to be going over a lot of people's heads. But what's really exciting about this isn't so much the numbers, it's the fact that we are going to have two qualified educators with slightly different points of view working collaboratively to create the absolutely best program.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you, and thank you for letting me sort that out. You realize it was about 24 hours ago that every clock in Canada stopped with 24 seconds to go.

It is now 6 of the clock. This House is adjourned until 9 of the clock on Tuesday, March 2.

The House adjourned at 1803.

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of Ontario**

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Mardi 2 mars 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 2 March 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 2 mars 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Hindu prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 1, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters / Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased, as the education critic for the PC caucus, to have this opportunity to make some remarks today regarding this bill, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, which has been brought forward by the Minister of Education. This act, Bill 242, is An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters. It was introduced into the House for first reading on February 17, 2010. Of course, now we're doing second reading, and ostensibly this will go to committee and there will be opportunities for public input in order that we can hear first-hand what some of the issues are that the public may have about this bill and how we can continue to make it better.

This bill basically does one thing: It would mandate that all school boards in the province of Ontario—and we have the four different school boards—would offer all-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds, the children in what we call today junior and senior kindergarten, and it would integrate extended-day programs into

schools. This bill would also give authority to school boards in the province of Ontario, and also the responsibility, which is quite different, to set, charge and collect the fees for the before- and after-school programs. We have had, at some schools, daycare programs that have been established, and usually it has been by an independent provider, but this bill would give the boards the authority and the responsibility to set, charge and collect the fees for the before- and after-school programs.

How did this all-day kindergarten come to be? Well, in 2007, after having promised this in the 2003 election, the Liberals did appoint an early learning advisor to develop this all-day kindergarten program. On November 27, 2007, the Premier did appoint Dr. Charles Pascal to recommend the best way to implement an all-day kindergarten program. Dr. Pascal submitted his report in July 2009. He entitled it *With Our Best Future in Mind* and he gave it to the Premier. On October 27, 2009, the government first made the announcement that it was going to be phasing in all-day kindergarten and that it would happen by 2015-16.

We now understand that perhaps those timelines have shifted, because I think the government has recognized, as we do, that they have a huge debt, they have a deficit, and it's becoming increasingly more difficult, as a result of the economic situation that we find ourselves in in the province of Ontario—we do not have the resources to do everything that we would like to do, and unless we see the creation of more private sector jobs and we see more taxes collected from people and businesses in the province of Ontario, it's going to be extremely difficult to do all things for all people. So the timeline will probably be shifting.

So what about this bill? What about this program? I would need to state categorically that I do support the principle of this program. In fact, if you take a look at the Progressive Conservative record over the past years, you will see that our party has long supported and recognized the need for early childhood development. In 1998, our government did commission the Early Years report. That study was chaired by Dr. Fraser Mustard, an outstanding individual in his promotion of ensuring that we give children the best start in life, and also by the Honourable Margaret McCain. That Early Years report was completed in 1999.

What it did was it emphasized the importance of working with communities to expand the capacity for early childhood development and also for parenting programs. I think it's important to recognize that obviously we need to do much more to support parents in the

province of Ontario to learn what it is to be a parent and how they can best support and interact with their children.

0910

The report stated that a focus on children's early years is crucial to ensure that Ontario enjoys a highly competent and well-educated population capable of participating fully in the new global economy. The study also confirmed that the better the nurturing and the learning experiences in early childhood, the better the outcomes.

As a result of the information that we were able to obtain from the early years report, we did several things. We created Ontario's early years centres; in fact, I would say to you that this has been one of the most successful initiatives related to the early years ever established in the province of Ontario. We created 103 of the 108 early years centres.

I know that in my own community, they have been a blessing for parents, for grandparents who look after their children and for child care providers. They have certainly been centres where parents and those who work with children have been able to see tremendous growth and have been able to nurture and provide excellent learning experiences for children.

I would also say to you that we spent, when we were in office, a record amount on child care. Between 1995 and 2003, our government doubled investments in children's social services to more than \$2.2 billion per year.

As well, our government established the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program. As a result, all children in this province are now screened at birth in order to determine if they may be at risk—that might be physical, mental or social. If it's deemed that some of these babies are at risk, they will be supported, first of all, by nurses, and later on by lay people, in order to help and support parents.

For many parents in the province of Ontario and for some of the people who have come to our shores, it's important that these people recognize that it's important to cuddle your baby, read to your children and to play games with them.

I will tell you: As a result of the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, more children each year have a better start in life. I was disappointed, however, recently, to see that this government of Premier McGuinty has made some reductions in funding for this program, because it has been highly, highly successful. In speaking to public health nurses, I have certainly received that information first-hand, and I certainly hope that we will not see any further reductions.

Another program that has been very, very beneficial has been the preschool speech and language program that we introduced, and 70,000 children with speech and language difficulties received help through that program. Again, it gave those young children the best opportunity to be the best they could be, and I think it again demonstrates that early intervention is extremely important in helping our children, particularly those who have special needs.

The other initiative that we introduced between 1995 and 2003 was the Ontario Breakfast for Learning initiative, because we recognized that many children were coming to school without any breakfast. We all know that if children are to learn and benefit from the environment at school, they obviously need good nutrition. I've certainly had the opportunity to go to schools and be with the children as volunteers make sure that they do receive the nutrition that is necessary to get them off to a good start each day.

Those are some of the programs that our government did put in place, and as I say, much of this is the result of the study that we commissioned, which was done by Dr. Mustard and by the Honourable Margaret McCain.

So now to all-day kindergarten. As I said, I do support this bill in principle. In fact, when I was chair of the school board, I supported the initiative whereby we were constructing daycare centres attached to our new schools. I think for many families today who have two parents working, or a single parent is heading up the family, it's really important that they know that their children are supported throughout the day, that they have that feeling of confidence and security. However, the biggest obstacle that we have with the introduction of this bill at this time is the additional cost of the program at a time when we have a record \$25-billion deficit. And we have absolutely no plan to deal with it.

Premier McGuinty has not made any announcements as to any plans that he has to deal with the debt, which has doubled, or the deficit, which is at \$25 billion. He has not shared with us any plans to ensure that we see an increase in jobs in the province of Ontario. In fact, do you know what? We were able to create an environment when we were in office that saw the private sector create over one million new jobs. What we've seen with this government is, each month, each year, a steady erosion of jobs in Ontario. We're also seeing more and more businesses going into bankruptcy. Again, this government desperately needs to make as a priority the creation of jobs by the private sector. The only place we're seeing job growth is in the public sector, and unfortunately, it's the hard-pressed taxpayer who is going to have to pay for the wages and the benefits of those jobs, when many people are having difficulty today making ends meet, particularly in light of the HST, which is going to burden families and seniors, and have a huge impact on the cost of living in the province of Ontario.

Yesterday, I did a radio talk show where they talked about taking the HST off of the price of gasoline. I know they've done that in British Columbia. Basically, we're opposed to the HST, but certainly this government needs to take a look at the impact and see what else they can do to make it revenue-neutral.

I talked about the fact that we don't have jobs. I guess, if we take a look at the deficit and we take a look at the priorities, one of the priorities has to be that the people who are unemployed be given the opportunity for retraining; and we're seeing that that's simply not happening. We saw the establishment of the Second Career program,

but then it was drastically and arbitrarily ended in one week. And now that it has come back into being, it hardly meets the need of about one tenth of the people who originally applied to it. I'm going to speak to that later as well.

The other priorities: I met last week with the Toronto District School Board, and the chairman said to me that they're desperately in need of special education funding. He told me that they're serving 5,200 more special-needs students with greater complexity. I believe this is probably common to boards throughout the province. We are seeing more and more special-needs students. But they are not receiving the funding that is necessary. According to the TDSB, the funding shortfall is presently equivalent to \$550 per student that is being served. So the cost of this multi-billion dollar program is a concern, certainly for school boards throughout the province of Ontario.

I got an e-mail last month from someone in Ottawa who is concerned about the upcoming provincial budget, is concerned about the funding for school boards and is concerned about the fact that they were hearing rumours that they would have to cut second-language teachers, special education teachers and educational assistants. They are very concerned about the impact that that type of major cut is going to have on the students who come to the schools and are desperately in need of support, whether it's the newcomer to Canada or whether it's, as they say, students with high risk. These are the other priorities that school boards have in the province of Ontario, and those needs are not being addressed.

0920

I think if we take a look at this program, the government has indicated that the plan is to spend \$200 million in 2010 and \$300 million in 2011 to get the program up and running. They've said that when it's fully implemented, by 2015 and 2016, the government's all-day kindergarten program will cost \$1.5 billion a year. However, I would say to you, Madam Speaker, that that is only an estimate, because what this government has failed to do, and always fails to do, is to accurately and completely submit to public scrutiny a plan of action, a plan of implementation, a plan that would identify each year how many more schools will be the beneficiaries of full-day kindergarten and what the cost will be. We haven't seen that—

Mr. John O'Toole: There's no plan.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: —because there is no plan. There is no long-term plan. They're simply saying, "We're going to do it. No matter what the cost, we're going to do it." And, of course, that is going to be a huge challenge for the taxpayers in the province of Ontario, who, as I said before, are already reeling from the about-to-be-introduced HST on July 1 or are reeling because they have lost their job or they have not been allowed entry into the Second Career program. People in this province are feeling quite challenged.

In fact, earlier today I talked to someone in the printing industry. They talked to me about the challenges that they're facing and the fact that their business may soon

go bankrupt. I've recently, in my own community, seen a men's clothing store, a ladies' clothing store and an Office Depot store go under. I heard also from someone about a mechanic in a garage who told me that business there is down. The reality is that people in this province are just hoping that they can recover from the recession that we've all experienced, but it's fragile, and they don't have any additional money for discretionary spending; they have so many fixed costs.

The other thing we know is going to go up is the price of electricity. People in this province have no idea what this government has done when it comes to energy. Over the next three or four or five years, we are going to see that the private sector is going to have more and more difficulty in creating new jobs. We're not even going to be able to attract new business to the province of Ontario because we're not going to have electricity prices that are affordable. There's somebody in my own community recently that has decided they're going to Ohio. It is a much better environment if you want to create jobs and expand your business. So this province right now, I would say to you, regrettably, because of the policies of this government, is in a very, very fragile state.

But let's take a look at another unknown cost of this program. I've said that the government estimates that it will cost \$1.5 billion a year, but we're certainly already seeing that it probably will cost more; that's just for operational costs. But there's another huge cost that they have not spoken about, and that is the cost of the new physical spaces that are going to be needed to accommodate the students in this program. There are many students in this province who are at schools where there's no additional physical capacity; and this government has said absolutely nothing about how they plan to pay for the additional physical spaces. In fact, unfortunately as well, this program is not going to be providing fair access to students in the province of Ontario. It's not necessarily going to be provided first to the students who are most in need of the additional support and nurturing and early learning opportunities. Because if a school doesn't have a physical space, there's not going to be a program. And this government has been totally silent as to what the cost might be. That is going to have a huge impact as to whether or not this program is going to be rolled out by 2015-16; and again, the additional question is, how are we going to pay for it?

Of course, the other issue is, how are parents going to be charged for the before and after programs? What type of programming will be available over the summer, and on PA days? There are many, many unanswered questions. Basically, we've heard, "We're going to do it. We don't know how we're going to do it. We don't know how long it's going to take us to do it. No, I'm sorry, I can't tell you when your school will have full-day learning. I'm sorry if your neighbour who goes to the Catholic school is going to have the program but you're not. You'll need to continue to pay for your child care costs." There are just so many unanswered questions. There's also the issue of unequal, unfair access to the program.

I think that's one thing this government should have done, is to have taken a look at what is it that we're going to do and how are we going to do it, and rolled out a complete and full implementation plan, year by year; have surveyed school boards, asked them what additional space was necessary; and at the same time as they announced the program, have been in the position to also indicate that school board B is going to get this amount of additional money to build this amount of space. I have parents now who are saying, "You know, Elizabeth, I have a one-year-old. My child might never be the beneficiary of this program, I'm going to have to pay the child care expenses and yet," as I said before, "the neighbour next door" whose children maybe go to the public school board, "those children will have access this year."

Nobody has considered who is going to get the program first. It's really all dependent on space. It's not according to need, whether that need is for additional nurturing and early learning, or whether that need is related to the ability to pay for the child care and the necessity of the child care.

This government, as always, just makes an announcement, wants the headlines, and then, afterwards, considers how they're going to pay for it. Well, this is also the province that has gone from first to last in Confederation. We used to be the economic powerhouse; we're now at the bottom. Jobs are simply not being created here. If you don't have job creation, if you don't have businesses wanting to expand, to come into the province—if you don't have those taxes, then you can't pay for educational costs, you can't pay for the health care costs, you can't pay for the social service costs that are so necessary.

Let's take a look. Let's go back to capacity. Currently, I understand, only one third of the schools in this province are able to completely accommodate all-day kindergarten right now. So what are the other two thirds going to do? Where's the plan? What's the cost of the additional space that's going to be required? It's going to be huge when it comes to capital investments. And who's going to pay for it? We've already got a \$25-billion deficit. This is a big issue. Somewhere this government is going to have to find savings, because we can't do everything. Of course, I go back to the whole issue of fairness. How are we going to make sure that all students and all families that need it and are a priority receive the program? There's absolutely no plan. There's no equality or fairness; it's simply going to happen in a very ad hoc manner. Families are not going to be able to plan for their future.

0930

Let's take a look at the implementation plan, the rollout, and what has been happening. Some trustees—although they're hesitant to be critical because they're afraid they won't get their fair share of funding—have indicated some concern about the implementation plan, the rollout of the program. One person was Irene Atkinson, a long-time trustee here in Toronto for Parkdale-High Park, who boldly said, "This is one of the most ill-

conceived and badly thought-out programs the province has ever announced." She has had lots of experience, and she obviously recognizes that there are two thirds of our schools that don't have the capacity. There are many students in the province who would benefit from this program and really need it; they aren't going to be the beneficiaries either.

Another trustee in Grand Erie, Don Werden, said that all-day kindergarten is "a runaway train waiting for a wreck. They"—the ministry—"will blame us when it doesn't work."

This is what happens when the government doesn't have a complete plan of implementation, when people are left asking questions, when people recognize that there are negative consequences to the program's introduction that aren't being addressed. So today, we're in a state where parents and educators continue not to have the necessary details as to how the program will be implemented, what schools are going to be eligible each year and what the total cost and staffing requirements are going to be as well.

There is concern in the province, and these are some of the questions that must be answered. We've heard from parents with concerns. We've heard from trustees. My colleague was telling me he has heard from some teachers, and certainly I have as well, and we've also heard from daycare operators.

It has been previously mentioned that up to 35,000 children in roughly 580 schools are expected to participate in the program this fall. Although the parents have been advised of the schools that will support all-day kindergarten this year, the concern is about the ones in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016. Is it going to go into 2017? Again, I just think that issue of inequity is very serious. Of course, it's not fair that one parent would have access to the program and another one would have to continue to pay child care costs, or maybe the child is going to another school for an indefinite period of time.

Another issue that has arisen is that I think we're seeing some competition among school boards. Again, there's some concern among school boards that funding maybe isn't being allocated equally. I can't speak to that issue; I just know that it has been brought to my attention.

Another serious issue has been the impact that this is going to have on daycare operators. I have heard from many daycare operators in the province of Ontario. Some of them have indicated that they may well have to close, which is certainly going to create hardship for people in the province of Ontario who depended on these daycare centres to look after their children when they were working. But they're saying that they may have to close; they may have to cut staff; they may have to close programs. There are some deliberations now going on, but they're pretty disappointed that there was no consultation before the introduction of the bill. They feel that they have met a need of children and families in this province over many years. They've tried to do what was right, and now, in many respects, they all have no choice but to either

reduce their programming capacity or just close down altogether. It inevitably will probably lead to the loss of some staff.

I think if we take a look at what Dr. Pascal recommended, you'll see that what the government has introduced is not one and the same. I think that's important, and that's part of the reason for the problems when it comes to daycare.

But I want to share with you a little story that was in the Brantford Expositor about a daycare operator. It says:

"Forty years ago, Judy Friel and her business partner, armed with \$400, opened their first child care centre.

"A labour of love, the work, she says, has never been an easy way to earn a living.

"As I look back on the chain of events that has happened, it is a wonder that we survived," said Friel. "There have been so many roadblocks to being an independent operator that the mind boggles."

"Now Friel, and the operators of 34 licensed child care centres in Brantford and Brant county, are more than a little concerned about how the province's plan to offer full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds will affect their businesses....

"There is no way we operators can find the financial resources to continue," said Friel. "The whole child care system will fold unless heavy subsidies are offered. Of course, the for-profit operator will not qualify for this kind of funding."

"Sue Norden," Brantford's "director of child care services, oversees all of the local licensed daycare centres."

Norden said that, regardless, "all operators will face financial hardship as full-day kindergarten rolls out over the next five years...."

Norden said that "four- and five-year-olds represent close to 20% of the total revenue at local child care centres...."

And I think that's something that the government didn't seriously consider. Often, the fees that are paid by the four- and five-year-olds' parents help to subsidize the cost of the younger children, because the cost is higher for younger children. So I think we're going to see in daycare centres an increase in the amount that is going to be asked of parents now that the daycare centres are only going to be providing daycare for children from birth to age three.

These people, such as Judy Friel, who opened a child care centre 40 years ago to support families and children, did it—and it is tough. I would agree with her. It's very tough to make a living as a child care operator. Certainly from my own experience, the people that I know at home do it because they love children and they want to support families. But these small business entrepreneurs are now going to be negatively impacted. They're going to have to make some decisions.

It's unfortunate that the government perhaps did not move forward as Dr. Pascal had recommended. Again, I want to stress that the government did not fully adopt the recommendations of Dr. Pascal. He called for the province to create a continuum of early learning and child

care. All we're seeing here is full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds. So, again, you have a problem.

The other issue that I've heard about is that some parents are telling me that if the school offers full-day and they only want their child to go to half-day, that's not going to be an option for them. I think we need to remember that kindergarten is not mandatory in the province of Ontario. You don't have to send your child, and some people choose not to. Sometimes they keep them at home and care for them themselves. Sometimes they prefer to leave them with family. But I think we need to recognize that if you make a decision that you don't want your child to go to full-day, you should have that opportunity and be able to have the half-day option.

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Having said that, I can tell you that, personally, I went to full-day kindergarten from age three on.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Look how well you turned out, Elizabeth.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: That's right. But I was living in Holland, so that was a very different story. Again, I say people need to have a choice. Do you want full-day, do you want half-day, or do you prefer that your child not go to kindergarten? Obviously, that's a decision that you need to make, and I would hope that parents would continue to have that freedom of choice.

I want to go back to the economic situation in the province of Ontario. Again, I want to stress that I do support all-day kindergarten in principle, but I am concerned about the other needs of our educational system. I've made reference to English as a second language. I've made reference to the special education needs. Regrettably, the number of children in our schools requiring special education support appears to be increasing, as we've heard from the Toronto school board. Some tough choices will need to be made.

I'm also concerned about the fact that our unemployed Ontarians need to be given access to retraining and to education. Before this government took office, there were 1,072,800 manufacturing jobs in Ontario. Today there are only 793,800. This represents a staggering loss of 279,000 net manufacturing jobs, and that's significant.

In my own community, people think that because we're high tech, we must have been spared, but last month Waterloo region's jobless rate did jump to 9.9% while the jobless rate nationally fell. We have a high jobless rate, but we've got Windsor with 12.8%, St. Catharines and Niagara with 11.2%, Oshawa with 10.4% and Sudbury with 10.4% as well.

We have a problem. We know that unemployment will ease as we move forward into the future, but as I've said before, it has been fragile. We certainly hope that this government, in its throne speech next week on Monday, comes out with a real plan as to how we can create the environment that is going to allow the private sector the confidence to create new jobs. I believe that has to be the government's first priority. We can only afford programs like this full-day program if we see new job creation, if

we see Ontario again moving up and becoming the economic powerhouse in Canada.

Ontario needs to focus on retraining and retooling its workforce. I attended a speech delivered by Dr. Rick Miner at the Canadian Club on February 3. According to Dr. Miner: "Ontario is on the verge of an unemployment crisis that could be far more destructive than the 2009 recession ... (And that) if current trends continue, hundreds of thousands of people will lack the necessary skills to find any work." That's why I believe it's so important that the government provide those who are unemployed—many of them with no grade 12 education, many of them lacking basic literacy and math skills—the opportunity to get those skills, then go into the retraining programs, go into the colleges, go to the universities. We need people with skills.

Dr. Miner indicates that if we don't take action, more than 700,000 people in Ontario will be unemployed by 2021. Why? They don't have the education. They don't have the basic skills. That is also going to mean that there are more than 1.1 million Ontarians who will be unemployed in just 11 years, and they will have no prospect whatsoever of finding work. In the meantime, we're going to have 1.3 million jobs where we don't have people with the skills and the training to fill the jobs. So we have a huge challenge in the province of Ontario.

We need to be providing more funding in order to make sure that our people in this province who are currently unemployed, graduating from grade 12, can access post-secondary education and training. This government needs to make sure that we put the money aside for apprenticeship training as well.

So while I agree with all-day kindergarten in principle, and although I have always supported early childhood development throughout my entire career, I am concerned about the students who are not going to have the skills they need to be able to access post-secondary education and training.

There's also growing evidence that many students lack the literacy and math skills that they currently need for post-secondary education. Some 44% of Canadian adults today don't have the literacy and numeracy skills they need, according to Statistics Canada and OECD. Roughly 30% of Canadian students aged 15 have a low level of proficiency in science or were just starting to demonstrate the competencies that would enable them to participate actively in life situations related to science and technology. We know that many students today are going into our universities—indeed, we did a survey of all the universities in the province of Ontario—and are coming ill-prepared or unprepared. The post-secondary institutions are having to give them upgrading courses in literacy, and are also having to provide them with math programs, numeracy programs, in order that they can become involved in the program of their choice at university for which they are not prepared when they get there. We're going to have to address that problem.

We need to make sure that our elementary and secondary school curricula are such that these students

leave our schools at the end of grade 12 with the literacy and numeracy skills and that we not be asking our universities in particular to provide make-up during the summer or an introductory course in the fall in order that that student is qualified.

The other thing I would say to you is that it's quite a shock to a student who has received a high grade as they exit secondary school to find out that they're not prepared for that math program once they do get to university, or they don't have the literacy skills, so we've got to do a better job.

But I want to talk about the Second Career program. This was a program that was advertised. I just have to tell you that I think my office has dealt with probably several hundred people who had high hopes when they lost their jobs, in the manufacturing sector in particular. I've indicated to you that in the region of Waterloo we have some of the same high statistics as we do elsewhere in Ontario, and probably Canada. But these people thought they could enter the Second Career program. They went through about eight months of applying, trying to find a job that they had to be able to demonstrate was going to be in need in the future. Many of these people were at the end of receiving their unemployment insurance. They were people with families. They thought that last September they were going to get into Conestoga College in my community, in particular, and they thought that they were going to be given the financial resources to support them. At the last moment, they were told that the program was oversubscribed and there was no money.

I have never seen such pain, such hurt, such devastation, such depression, as with the people who either physically visited my office or wrote me, e-mailed me, called me. In fact, I would say to you that I have never seen the two women in my office who deal with constituents in the state that they were in. They worked beyond the regular hours. They tried to follow through on each and every case and see if there wasn't some way we could help those people get into the program. Really, it was unbelievable.

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In fact, some of the comments that we heard from people—it was despair. One person was on the verge of suicide. Some people realized that with the UI, the unemployment insurance, running out, they were going to have to go on welfare, and you know what it means to go on welfare. You basically have to get rid of anything and everything that you own. These people were going to find it really difficult to continue to pay the mortgage on their houses and support their families.

We had the program. We had people with high hopes. They thought they could retrain for a second career. Then, as I say, the program was oversubscribed, and there was no more money left.

In September, the government said that they would probably introduce it again, but what did they do? They changed the rules. When the program was finally reintroduced in December, people who qualified under the old rules no longer qualified. They were no longer eligible

for financial, educational and training support. We have the devastation all over again. We have the shock.

Again, their hopes had been raised. They had been told in September, "We're going to reintroduce the program," but they weren't told that the criteria was going to change. You know what? We have to be honest with these people. We need to be better able to determine how many people are going to require retraining and post-secondary education, and we need to provide the funding because these are the men and the women who support the children in the province of Ontario.

I urge this government: This has to be a priority for you. I hope that, in your throne speech next week, you will have programs that are going to support the unemployed. I hope that those who qualified under the original rules will still be grandfathered because, really, to have raised their hopes and dashed them is very, very unfair.

These are some of the other priorities that this government needs to deal with. But I want to end with a few questions. I want to ask the government: How will you pay the operational costs of this program? How will you pay for the additional physical spaces that are going to be required in two thirds of our schools? When will you actually roll out a plan of implementation so that we can see what schools in what communities will qualify each and every year? How will you ensure that the students who most need the program because of circumstances are eligible and provided for? It's much like the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program where you take a look at students, you identify those who are most at risk, and then you provide them with the support necessary.

Also, how is this government going to explain to families who aren't going to have access to the program this year or next year, or the year thereafter, that they're going to have to continue to pay for child care but their neighbours and their friends will not? There is no equity. There is no fairness. That's a huge issue.

I suspect that this issue will actually grow, and I believe that people are going to see that there probably wasn't enough thought given to how this would be rolled out into providing access to those who need it the most and in a way that it would be perceived to be fair.

I want to conclude my remarks at this time. I again want to just mention that I do support this program in principle. I look forward to committee, and I think that as a result of having committee, hopefully we'll hear from the public and there will be some good recommendations that come forward. Hopefully, at the end of the day, this program will be the best that it can be for the students and the parents in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Without a doubt, members of the NDP support the idea of full-day kindergarten, the idea of expanding and extending the daycare system in this province, the education system. But we are very troubled, very worried by what we are hearing increasingly from the daycare sector, that daycare centres that have financial stability and sustainability when they're providing

care for four-year-olds and five-year-olds, for whom there was only half-day daycare—those daycare centres are finding that their economics are coming unglued, that they don't have the base with which to provide the care for two- and three-year-olds and infants, that their economics have been profoundly shaken. I think that this government has to look at the simple reality of what's going on in the daycare sector and say, "We can't essentially sacrifice daycare for toddlers in order to fund full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds." We need to have that full-day kindergarten, but we also need the full funding for child care right through the age groups, from birth on until full-time education, after-school and preschool programs, so that our children get the full advantage of education, from the very beginnings of life, in a quality way and continuously in their experience through school.

So I'd say to the government, look again at the Pascal report, look at his recommendations to bring in a full range of child care from zero up, and don't make the mistake of reallocating dollars from daycare centres that need it now to pay for this new program. Put the dollars in that are necessary to make sure that this program functions well, in a high-quality way, but don't rob the smaller children to make sure that this program can function.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I welcome this opportunity to provide a few comments on Bill 242, full-day learning in our school system. Research data to this date has clearly pointed out that children who get an early start in the education system perform better in our education system and have a greater possibility of being very successful in life. I believe our government is doing the right thing by investing in early learning for our children. I think it's good for the parents and I think it will be good for Ontario as time goes on.

In my own riding of Scarborough—Rouge River, I'm getting several schools, and I've got to tell you, with the people that I represent, which is the working class—where many moms and dads have to go to work on a daily basis to provide for the family—many kids in my community cannot take full advantage of the programs that exist today, an example being the early childhood centres that were built a couple of years ago with provincial and federal funding. That is because mom and dad are not home to take them to the program and the program requires parents' participation.

This program will definitely meet the needs of my community because it provides access to everyone. That is an important thing in a community such that I represent, because it'll give the children an early start and it'll give them a chance to succeed in life. And somewhere down the road, some future government—maybe not this government—will probably realize the real fruits of this investment that the government of Ontario is taking today.

It takes leadership to make decisions like this, and I think our government is doing the right thing.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Wilson: As usual, my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo did an excellent job of explaining that, no doubt, this program will be popular and is popular with many parents and families, but we simply can't afford it at this time. We need to concentrate on getting jobs in this province and not spending \$1.3 billion or \$1.5 billion or maybe even much more than that on a brand new program that, in my 20 years, I never had an e-mail about, I never had a letter about and no one ever asked me for it. They never expected the state would look after their little babies.

The daycare operators in my riding aren't very happy. I have a memo to me from yesterday from Joy Parks. She's my constituency assistant in Collingwood. Gail Ardiel, owner of two daycares in my area, dropped into my office in Collingwood to advise us of additional problems with full-day kindergarten. I'll just read the memo:

"Locally, Stayner's Clearview Meadows Elementary School has been chosen as a full-day kindergarten site. Gail owns a daycare in Stayner. This new full-day program will result in losing her four- and five-year-old children to the school system. Also, Gail currently runs the before/after school program for the area and now with the full-day kindergarten, she'll lose that income too. She has approached the elementary school to ask if she could do the before/after school program" for them, "but they refused, saying they would staff it themselves.

"Because Gail has a licensed daycare,"—she actually has two—"and some of her spaces are subsidized, she was hopeful that the ... full-day kindergarten program would open up new subsidized child care spaces." That isn't the case. "The county of Simcoe currently has a freeze on child care subsidies, and because they're over budget (the province has not increased the funding), no new spaces will open.

"So, this full-day kindergarten will result in Gail possibly having to close her doors because of lack of children. Plus, the county won't be able to assist other families in the area with child care subsidies."

As has been mentioned by my honourable colleague, you really messed this one up for daycare operators across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd just like to add my voice to comments with reference to the dialogue on Bill 242 and the comments made by my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo. This is an interesting bill, in the sense that if you look at it and isolate the issue from cost concerns—what the province should be doing versus what the province can be doing—it sounds like a pretty good idea. Who wouldn't want to provide these kinds of services to younger children? Obviously, the report that the bill is based upon recommended doing just that. Mr. Pascal is an educator of some repute. Interestingly, however, the

recommendation of that report was not to put teachers in charge on an all-day basis and incur even larger costs on the basis of doing that.

However, that's what the government has chosen to do in a time where we can ill afford the program, much less those additional costs. That's the thing that, I think, we have to focus upon. If you take a look at the fact that we're about to receive a new provincial budget in the middle of what we'd like to charitably describe as a post-recessionary period, when we're not really out of the woods yet and we're looking at an estimated debt of \$25 billion this year, another \$20 billion next year and more the year after that, with a total debt of \$200 billion, what are we doing looking at new programs?

I've heard from people all over the province about this particular issue. As I started out saying, on the face of it, it's a great issue; timing—very wrong. I liken it to a family that has a particular amount of income coming in, and they have to decide at a given point, probably around January, whether or not they're going to get that Caribbean vacation. But if they have X dollars and that Caribbean vacation is going to cost Y more, it has to wait for next year. I fear that this decision is being made absent that thought.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo has up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I thank the members from Scarborough–Rouge River, Toronto–Danforth, Simcoe–Grey and Thornhill. I think that, overwhelmingly, the principle of the proposal for full-day kindergarten is well received, but we're also increasingly hearing concerns. There's a lot of uncertainty about the impact and the fact that the government didn't bother to get it right.

The government didn't bother to do the consultations with the people in the province of Ontario, whether it was the daycare operators who now are seeing their livelihood threatened, and as a result some families throughout the province may see an erosion of daycare spaces because, as my colleague pointed out, the municipalities aren't putting in any more money, so it could well have an impact on the younger children. But the government didn't bother to take a look at that impact.

As well, we have parents throughout the province who are faced with some uncertainty and are feeling that access to the program is unequal in that there isn't a plan of implementation.

I pointed out that there are about two thirds of the schools in the province that don't have the physical space. The government hasn't spoken to how they're going to provide the space.

It's great to make an announcement, but when you do make an announcement, make sure you know what your total cost is. Make sure you know what it's going to cost each year. Make sure you know how it's going to be implemented. Make sure you provide some certainty to parents throughout the province as to when and where they can expect the program to be available. And, at the end of the day, make sure that at this point in time in the history of this province you can afford it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'll be splitting what time is left with the member from Nickel Belt.

Our major concern is not the "what" but the "how" and the "how long." We want this done right the first time. Boards like the Toronto District School Board have already expressed concerns about whether or not the funding being provided by the government is adequate. The government's five-year rollout of the program will be uneven and not equitable. A five-year rollout period is quite a long time and will leave thousands of children out of the program. If this government runs true to form, five years will become 10 years.

The loss of four- and five-year-olds will have a significant impact on daycares. The overhead for four- and five-year-olds is much lower than for younger children. This will increase daycare costs and result in closures or increased fees for the parents of younger children still in the daycare system.

We also have concerns that some boards will provide full-day service to a school that has not received funding in order to remain competitive if the other board in the community offers full-day in its schools. This happened in Sudbury. This competition between schools in the same area could prove to be a significant problem for boards. Also, if a school sets up full-day learning without government funding, where is the money coming from? What other programs will have to be cut?

Some of the provisions that are taking place: The McGuinty government has announced the funding for full-day kindergarten. The goal is to provide 35,000 students by 2010, 50,000 students by 2011 and full implementation by 2015—over 200,000 students. The cost will be \$200 million in the first year and \$300 million in the second year, rising to \$1.5 billion annually in 2015-16—quite a challenge for a government that has a \$25-billion deficit.

The government claims that 25% of schools already have the class space for full-day kindergarten; our numbers are closer to 35%. There will be one certified teacher and one ECE, early child care worker, in each class.

The class size is going up, not down like the government claims, to an average of 26 students from 20. A lot of the early education teachers and teachers have their hands full with 20 as it is, and some of them need extra for kids who need extra care. They're having problems servicing them now.

Before- and after-school care will be provided on a needs basis for a fee depending on the available space. I guess we're on competition level again.

Stakeholder positions: The teacher federations support the announcement. CUPE supports the announcement as the first step in a long-term process:

"The best way to keep our eyes on the prize is to involve all concerned parties in the implementation of this new program. That means parents, schools, school- and community-based child care agencies, ECEs and teachers and the unions that represent them. Particularly,

the province must take care not to disrupt existing child care programs as we go through the transition to an integrated, seamless day"—Sid Ryan, the new head of the largest Canadian labour—sorry.

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M^{me} France Gélinas: The Canadian Labour Congress.

Mr. Paul Miller: The Canadian Labour Congress.

CUPE now has concerns about the disruption of existing programs.

The McGuinty government continues to make highly publicized announcements that are long on media and short on substance. We totally support the concept of all-day learning, but we expressed many concerns when the government rolled out this program, and this piece of legislation does little—I repeat, little—to alleviate our concerns and the concerns of parents and care providers around our province.

The announcement commits a fixed sum of money to the creation of full-day kindergarten classes in Ontario. The actual mechanisms to make it happen are not specified. There has been a serious lack of attention to the actual implementation of this program.

We've waited a long time for this, and many families will wait another five years. The weight will put many children behind, assuming that it will be rolled out fully in five years, which I doubt.

Will the funding for the initial rollout be distributed equitably across the province or will it go where there is space? Will the programs approved in the first few years be needs-based or just space-based?

We are concerned that the class size of 26 is an average and are concerned that the class sizes may become too large, like many of our current grade 4 to grade 8 classes where there is no cap. An average of 26 means that many classes will be higher. Even with two adults, there are practical problems caused by having 30 four-year-olds in one space. You have to consider snacks, nap time, washroom accompaniment etc.

Parents expect this to be all-day learning, not all-day babysitting. From an instructional point of view, the large numbers will limit learning. Many parents will discover that their children did more learning in the daycare they were in before this program existed.

My wife was a kindergarten teacher—she's retired—and she used to tell me that around 1:30 in the afternoon the little ones were asking for mommy, they were tired, they wanted to go home and their attention span was zero. So I don't know how they're going to deal with that to keep the kids active and not tire them out. Are they going to have extra naps? I don't know what they're going to do, but they certainly haven't addressed this problem.

Speaking from experience, all-day kindergarten is a long day for a four- or five-year-old. It used to be a long day for me even in high school; I wanted to get out of there myself. I'm not quite sure how they're—

Hon. John Gerretsen: That explains a lot.

Mr. Paul Miller: I did get out occasionally.

Interjection: You're still suffering.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, I'm still suffering.

Charles Pascal called for an Early Years division in the Ministry of Education to develop and implement a coordinated policy around child care. We are sure that this announcement stops well short of the completely integrated child care plan that Pascal put forward.

We are still awaiting the details of the actual form the typical class will take. We want to see the actual distribution of workload between the teacher and the ECE. The government is dumping all the details on school boards and teachers' federations, and there are few specifics in the bill to alleviate the concerns felt by many of these groups.

Many boards are already claiming that the government is not providing adequate funding to pay the going rate for ECEs. The government's pitiful—I repeat, pitiful—education funding formula already places boards in the position of having to take from one program to pay for another. The question now is what programs will have to be cut to pay for an inadequately funded all-day learning program.

Consideration must be given to the potential loss of revenue for daycares, which may put them at risk or drive up costs to parents whose children remain in daycares.

There have also been suggestions that daycares should be allowed to lower standards and increase the number of children permitted per caregiver to cope with the changes. How will this affect the boards that already have full-day kindergarten, like most of the French boards in the province?

There must be subsidies for before- and after-school care to ensure accessibility. The bill acknowledges the need for subsidies but offers no rates for the service and gives parents no specific information.

Madam Speaker, I could go on for a long time, but I'm now going to pass off my last couple of minutes to the member from Nickel Belt, who has great concerns about this herself.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Il me fait plaisir d'ajouter ma voix aux commentaires qui ont été faits ce matin au sujet du projet de loi 242, le projet de loi qui va créer la maternelle et le jardin à temps plein pour les enfants de l'Ontario.

Comme plusieurs de mes collègues l'ont dit, moi aussi j'ai des inquiétudes. Est-ce que la maternelle et le jardin à temps plein sont quelque chose de bien? Absolument. Si tu regardes dans le programme de langue française, ils ont des maternelles et le jardin à temps plein depuis plusieurs années. Ça prépare bien les enfants. Lorsque c'est bien fait, ça leur apporte beaucoup, et certainement, c'est en ligne avec les recommandations que le D^r Pascal avait faites.

Bien que le but dans son ensemble soit quelque chose de bien, là où on a des inquiétudes, c'est vraiment l'impact de cette nouvelle initiative du gouvernement sur les enfants plus jeunes, ceux qui dépendent du système des garderies.

Certainement, mon collègue vient de le dire ce matin : l'impact est considérable, et il semble que les économies qu'on devait faire au niveau des garderies servent à financer ce qui va se passer au niveau du jardin et de la maternelle. Malheureusement, on n'a pas regardé quel est l'impact sur les garderies. On voit dans les journaux partout que de plus en plus de garderies ne sont plus viables; elles doivent fermer leurs portes. On a vu à Windsor que c'était le cas. La même chose se passe dans mon comté, où des garderies n'auront plus suffisamment d'enfants pour rester ouvertes et n'auront plus suffisamment d'argent pour payer les factures.

Ça ressemble un peu à payer un programme pour les enfants de quatre ans sur le dos des petits enfants d'un an, de deux ans, de trois ans. Je ne pense pas que c'est quelque chose que veulent ni les parents, ni les Ontariens et Ontariennes non plus. Il faut une balance dans tout ça; il faut s'assurer que les recommandations du D^r Pascal sont prises dans leur ensemble pour la petite enfance—

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. It being 15 past 10, I declare that this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Shurman: Good morning. I'd like to introduce a number of Jewish students from the University of Toronto who are here with us in the Legislature today to observe question period and to meet with various MPPs. Welcome to Josh Rosen; Josh Moskowitz; Casey Ben-chimol; Liat Ben-Choreen; Jesse Braun; and Lindsey Lustig.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Good morning. I'd like all of our colleagues to welcome visitors to the House today as part of Toronto 101, an annual event that's organized with the farmers from my riding and surrounding ridings, who spend a day in Toronto understanding Toronto's issues, because our members, of course, go to our riding to learn about agricultural issues. We have over two dozen visitors here today, and they'll be observing question period before we go out to Scarborough—Guildwood.

Mr. David Zimmer: I too would like to introduce some Jewish students from the University of Toronto, Ryerson and Hillel here in Toronto who are visiting the Legislature today: Adam Solomon; Mitch Reiss; Laura Herman; and Rabbi Aaron Katchen. Welcome to the Legislature today.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have the family of page Quinton Lowe here today. The parents are Gordon and Tamara Lowe; the grandparents are Marion and George Stewart; the grandparents on the other side are Barry Lowe and Judy Currier; the aunts and uncles are Brian and Mary Ecker; and an additional uncle, Carl Ecker. Welcome to all.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Interjection.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I do have introductions.

I've got introductions on behalf of page Julia Louis. Her cousin Sonya Louis is here. Sonya's with her grade 10 civics class from Whitefield academy—and they're in the public gallery. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't realize that; I do now.

Well, that doesn't look like their class up there; they must be on their way.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the finance minister. Yesterday, when you were asked why a record number of Ontario patients are crossing the border to get the health care they need when they need it, you said, "Fewer Ontarians than ever have to do that." But numbers don't lie. The number of patients crossing the border to get timely health care has gone from slightly under 2,000 to slightly over 12,000 patients per year under Dalton McGuinty.

Why would you say fewer Ontarians have to get American health care?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to clarify. I think the member opposite needs to understand that the number does not refer to patients who are going out of the country, but rather, a good portion of that is specimens that are going out of the country, particularly for genetic testing.

We have made some real progress when it comes to repatriating surgeries that are done outside the country. Particularly, we've made terrific progress when it comes to bariatric surgery. There was a time when very little bariatric surgery was performed here, and patients did go to the States for that surgery. We have now invested \$75 million to bring those patients home.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: There's a distinction that's made there without a difference. The actual question here is the difference between the facts and what comes out of the mouths of the McGuinty Liberals.

Minister Duncan said that fewer patients than ever are crossing into the US to get MRIs, cancer care and cardiac procedures, but the numbers have grown so much that a whole industry of Dalton McGuinty's health brokers has popped up. The number of patients crossing into the US to get the care they need when they need doubled since your 2007 throne speech alone. You had to know this, so why did you say that fewer patients than ever are crossing into the US to get health care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, I do acknowledge that there is still work to do when it comes to providing care right here. Bariatric surgery is an area where we

have made terrific gains. It's better for the patients, not just because they get the surgery here but because they get the care ahead of time and the post-surgical care. With something like bariatric surgery, it's very important that we think of it not just as a procedure but a series of initiatives that provide the best possible outcomes.

We are moving forward to repatriate bariatric surgeries. We're moving forward with a plan to bring back some of the genetic testing that has been sent out.

It's the right thing to do, and we're doing this in an aggressive way.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It just points to the fact that Ontario families are right not to trust what comes out of the mouths of the McGuinty Liberals.

To get the care they need when they need it, the fact is, Ontario families either have to live in a border town or contact one of Dalton McGuinty's health brokers. Don't take my word for it. On November 26, the Minister of Health told the House: "There has been a dramatic increase in out-of-country health care provided and covered through OHIP." The Minister of Finance was sitting right beside her when she said it. The facts haven't changed since then, but you said that fewer patients than ever are going to the US anyway. Why would you have said that?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When it comes to repatriating procedures here, we are taking important steps. One example that I'm reminded off by my seatmate is angioplasty that was done in the States and is now being done in Windsor.

New cancer care and drug treatments will save \$15 million in care for people who did previously have to go out of country.

I remember a time when the Conservatives sent pregnant women to Buffalo to have their babies. I think we've made an important improvement, and we will continue to do more.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Acting Premier. Dalton McGuinty's throne speech just cannot be believed. In the 2007 throne speech, he said he would help the forestry industry. If that were true, then northern Ontario wouldn't be facing a court decision this week that will see US Georgia-Pacific buy the assets of Grant Forest Products for 30 cents on the dollar. That will kill about 1,500 direct and indirect jobs.

Acting Premier, why did you say you would help the forestry industry when Grant Forest Products' dire situation shows that you haven't?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: It's important to note what we say in a throne speech and then what happens subsequently by the government, with or without the support of the opposition parties.

We said in our 2007 throne speech that we were going to reduce ER wait times, and we have. We said we were

going to lower wait times for surgical procedures in hospitals, and we have. We said we were going to—

Interjections.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Simcoe North. Minister?

Hon. Sandra Papatello: We said that we were going to eliminate taxes across the board for so many businesses, and we are moving to do that. We said that we were going to lower those class sizes, and we did that. In every initiative that appeared in our throne speech, we have moved to make that happen for the people of Ontario, regardless of the greatest recession that we've ever seen.

Yes, we know that there is more work to do in forestry. There is more work to do in economic development. But this member in particular knows full well that we are as aggressive as ever in promoting Ontario businesses around the world—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: The minister clearly doesn't know what I'm talking about. On the forestry file, it's devoid of notes. This is urgent. If the fire sale is allowed to happen, Engelhart will be badly hurt, Timmins will be decimated, and it will mark the 63rd mill that will be closed under your watch.

Some 1,500 jobs, families and communities that rely on the jobs could be saved by your acting. You have the power to intervene. You have the power to cut the red tape that would allow Grant Forest Products to access the well-funded, underutilized forest sector loan guarantee program. You have the power to save these families, these communities and this historic company. Will you do it?

Hon. Sandra Papatello: To the Minister of Forestry.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I think it's important to remind the member that Grant Forest Products is in CCAA, which as you know is a court process, and it would be inappropriate for us to interfere with a court process. Having said that, I am aware—we are all obviously aware—of the sale of Grant Forest Products' Engelhart and Earlton facilities to Georgia Pacific. We know that Georgia Pacific has been meeting with local municipal leaders and the community and that they are, indeed, committed to running the Engelhart facility at full capacity. That's a very important point. We do, indeed, understand that this is a very challenging time. Ownership changes are a very difficult part of the process for all communities, but our objective is to promote and to maintain a sustainable forestry sector in the province of Ontario. That's our goal, and that's what we hope will be the end result of the situation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: While this government has forgotten about its promises to the north, it handed Ford Motor \$81 million for 757 jobs that only may be created. Meanwhile, Grant Forest Products represents a made-in-

Ontario business valued at over a billion dollars and the impending loss of 1,500 jobs right now. This is all about priorities in the jobs-starved north. There is \$300 million still sitting in the forest sector loan guarantee fund. Will you commit to a no-cash investment in our own people, a homegrown business, Ontario forestry technology, the resource-rich north, or do we sell our birthright to Georgia Pacific for 30 cents on the dollar?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I think the member knows that the court has received three bids. The court-appointed monitor is making decisions in that regard. I know that there is a consortium of northern business people who have also expressed an interest in Grant's assets, and I am confident that the court will give appropriate consideration to that request.

Let me remind the member as well that we are taking measures to put Ontario's wood back to work. We've got a wood supply competition presently under way—we've extended the date for that to March 31 for proposals—11 million cubic metres of wood is going to be put up for bid, and we want to see that wood put to work. We are doing a review of our forest tenure process, which I think can bring about a reform about the way that we do allocate licences and price wood in the province of Ontario.

We recognize that there are many challenges. I represent a riding that has faced those challenges, and I can tell you that we're very committed to seeing a return to prosperity for the forestry sector in the province of Ontario.

PATIENT SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Health. Today Laurie Johnston announced she'll be going to court after an unnecessary mastectomy. She's not the only woman this happened to. When a mistake like this happens once, it is a tragedy. But when it happens more than once, it is absolutely unforgivable. These cases in Windsor have brought to light growing concerns about pathology in this province.

Is the minister finally ready to look at the way that pathology is practised here in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I appreciate the question. What has happened in Windsor is certainly a wake-up call for all of us. I want to start by expressing my sympathy for the people who have been affected by this and their families.

I want you to know that we are taking this issue very seriously. The hospital is doing a review. The College of Physicians and Surgeons is doing their review. But I didn't think that was enough. I have appointed three very highly regarded investigators to go to Windsor, to understand what happened there, to advise us on the lessons that we need to learn from this. My highest priority is to ensure that those who are concerned about their own personal pathology results get the assurance as quickly as possible. I've asked them to make that the top priority. We do need to look at this system, and that is exactly what we are doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A wake-up call? Laurie woke up without one of her breasts. That's what happened in this province.

Pathologists themselves say that there's a patchwork of protocols around their profession right now. New pathologists are ready to work but can't find jobs, and others are saying that they are severely overworked at the same time. Some hospitals have standards and others have none.

People who go to a hospital in Ontario need to know that they're getting the best possible care. Why is Ontario using a patchwork system that leaves some pathologists unemployed while others struggle with unmanageable caseloads?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to take this opportunity to assure the people of Ontario that they can be proud to be part of what is, in my opinion, the best health care system anywhere. I would not trade Ontario's health care system for any other in the world.

When a situation arises, it is incumbent upon us to learn what lessons can be learned and to act on those lessons. That is why we have appointed the three investigators. I have asked them to focus first on Windsor, and then, based on that information, if they think the right thing to do is to go beyond Windsor, we will do that.

It's the right thing to do. We want to continue to improve patient safety in this province, and that's why we've taken the steps that we have taken.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People are already very concerned about what they are seeing happening in their hospitals, but these tragedies risk shaking people's faith in our entire health care system. A patchwork system that leaves some pathologists overworked while others are unemployed makes no sense at all.

When will the minister finally set standards for transparency and province-wide protocols to ensure that this never happens again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think that all of us in this House have a responsibility to be responsible when it comes to talking about issues such as this. I think the leader of the third party maybe ought to speak to the health critic, her caucus colleague. Yesterday, France Gélinas made a very wise statement when she said we ought to be careful not to incite panic. Let's learn from Windsor and go from there. The member opposite should speak to her health critic.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Minister of Finance. Last week, when I asked the minister if he could tell us how much the HST is going to cost the average family for gas at the pumps, he said, "No, I can't." However, in an FOI request, an appeal document, the Ministry of Finance actually states the opposite. It says the minister was told how much the HST

on gas is going to cost consumers. In fact, I'll send the document over to him via this page so it will remind him of what's in that document.

Will the minister now, as he reviews that document, admit that he knows the answer to my question, and will he simply provide it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I don't know what the price of gas will be on July 1. Now, I notice that you've removed the date on the document, so it could be considerably out of date. I think this document goes back about a year and a half. The price of gas, depending on the specific date, is lower than it was then. But, no, I can't.

What I can tell her is that we have put together a package of tax reforms that will create 600,000 new jobs. What I can tell her is that the personal tax cuts for Ontarians kicked in this past January 1. I can also tell her that 93% of Ontarians will pay less taxes than they did before. And I can also tell her that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

1050

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I just remind the honourable members to reflect on the words of former Deputy Speaker Mr. Johnson, who reminded members that when two people were standing and the Speaker was one of them—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In blocking our FOI requests trying to find out how much people were going to be paying at the pumps, the Ministry of Finance wrote this: "These figures ... could ... give rise to a negative effect on consumer confidence. A decrease in consumer spending would in turn have an adverse effect on economic growth and job creation."

Does this minister agree with his staff that telling people exactly how much they're going to be hosed at the pumps is going to trigger an economic collapse?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member uses an undated document that is taken out of context and not part of the broader FOI that she got. She is trying to be, I think, too clever by half. If she read—

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Taxes are being cut; spending will be stimulated. That is precisely why we put together the package we did. I suspect that's why Hugh Mackenzie and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives rejected—absolutely, categorically rejected—your claim that this is a tax grab. They said, no, it's not. You don't have to believe me. You don't have to believe the chamber of commerce. You don't have to believe Ontario's business community. I invite you to endorse Hugh Mackenzie and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and their document entitled Not a Tax Grab After All.

It's about jobs. We have a plan. We're going to create those jobs. That member and her party are—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Start the clock. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Gee, all that bluster from the minister. All I was asking was the impact the HST is going to have on people at the pumps—a simple question, and he can't answer it.

The minister is deliberately withholding the basic facts about the HST. People have the right to know how much the HST is going to cost them, and he has that information.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I withdraw, Speaker.

The minister's department claims that releasing this information "could be injurious to the financial interests of Ontario and the ability of the government to manage the economy."

Interjection: I didn't hear her withdraw.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Give her a polygraph test.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister of Economic Development and Trade, please withdraw the comment.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I withdraw, Speaker.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Does this minister really believe that telling people how much more it's going to cost them at the pumps could actually bring Ontario to the edge of economic collapse, or is it more about protecting the interests of the governing party?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member only needs to read the document she sent me, where it says that what she's saying takes everything out of context.

I'd remind her that, as recently as a year ago, she and her party advocated for a 1% increase in the provincial sales tax.

They have no idea about how to create jobs. All they can do is take one line out of one document where they remove the date, torque the answers and ignore the largest personal tax cut for the lowest-income Ontarians in the history of this province.

We will defend this plan. We will create jobs. We will give the whole truth. We will tell the whole story. What that story is is a bigger and better Ontario when this package and the work of this government is fully implemented, as opposed to the old, tired rhetoric of a party that has no idea about how to deal with a deficit, much less—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. New question.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. In the 2007 throne speech, Dalton McGuinty promised Ontario patients that they would get the health care they need when they need it. But here's what the Ontario Health Quality Council says: Waits for

MRIs are three to four times longer than what you said they would be. An industry of Dalton McGuinty's health brokers, like EcuMedical and International Health Care Providers, has popped up to whisk Ontario patients to Michigan or Colorado for an MRI the same day.

If Dalton McGuinty's health brokers were part of the plan all along, why didn't you mention them in the throne speech?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will be the first to thank the Ontario health quality group for the work they are doing. They do help us make the strategic investments that we need to make.

We have a committed strategy to reduce wait times in this province. We have achieved remarkable success. There are areas where we need to do better, and shortening wait times for MRIs is one of those areas where we've made some improvement and we need to make more. We publicly report what MRI wait times are across the province. People can, if they wish, take the time, go online, check the website and see what MRI wait times are in their area and across the province.

We've really accomplished something quite terrific, because we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The fact is that cuts are being made to health care across this province. Frankly, Ottawa patients don't trust the minister when she says that cuts at their hospital are going to improve the quality of health care. Only in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario do cuts, wait time increases and health brokers equal improved care.

The Ontario Health Quality Council also says that half of cancer patients who need surgery wait longer than what is medically acceptable.

Maybe before you get rid of the Ombudsman he'll have a chance to report on the Niagara LHIN and say something about Kaleida Health, which has taken out billboard ads that brazenly say, "Fast-track your medical procedure here," with an arrow that points to Buffalo.

You didn't mention this in your last throne speech. How can Ontario patients trust the McGuinty Liberals when they only tell half the story?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Talk about telling half the story. Let's talk about what we've done to improve health care in this province. Almost 900,000 more Ontarians have access to family care; 2,300 more physicians are practising in Ontario now than in—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Me?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Yeah, you. Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There are more than 5,600 international medical graduates practising in Ontario, which represents almost a quarter of the physician workplace. We've opened a new Northern Ontario School of Medicine, and by 2013, we will have doubled the number of doctors graduating every year. We've established 170 family health teams that now care for more than two million Ontarians, including over 300,000 that did not

previously have access to a family doctor. We've hired 10,000 more nurses—and I would be pleased to go on.

The health care system is measurably and significantly—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Two weeks ago, a Brantford Expositor reporter stumbled in on a meeting between the member from Brant, a mayoral candidate, a city councillor and Tony Perruzza, the man behind the big mega-developer First Urban. The meeting took place in a private room in Brantford's Olde School Restaurant.

Asked about the meeting, the member from Brant said that he was there on behalf of the Premier and as the new parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Can the minister tell this House what instructions he gave to the member from Brant and what the member from Brant said on his behalf while lunching with this developer?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This isn't kindergarten and parliamentary assistants are entitled to take meetings with whomever they wish. The member from Brant doesn't check with me before he takes meetings. He's a grown-up, he's an experienced politician, and he works very hard for the people of Brant. This is a member of provincial Parliament who has very much distinguished himself here through things like private members' business, where he's worked even with members on the opposite side on some very important initiatives, and a member who has worked very hard for his community.

I can only assume that when the member takes meetings, they're meetings that he believes are part of his responsibility, either as an MPP or as a parliamentary assistant. He's totally entitled to do that.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The member was very clear to the press that he was there on your behalf and on your instruction. The member for Brant told the reporter that his private meeting was about the area's so-called green energy hub.

But people of the community are questioning that claim. After all, First Urban is in the middle of an OMB battle. They are trying to build a suburb on farmland outside of Brantford. To make their development work, they need water and sewer infrastructure, and a way around the growth planning and restrictions—exactly the thing that the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure oversees.

Why can't the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure tell this House what his parliamentary assistant is promising developers behind closed doors?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That's almost laughable. But let me tell you something: My parliamentary assistant Dave Levac is working very, very hard on promoting the Green

Energy Act. He's very committed to promoting economic development in the region of Brant. We're committed to working with him in those endeavours.

Indeed, it's because of the Green Energy Act that we've attracted 16,000 jobs coming to this province, a \$7-billion investment. It's because of the Green Energy Act that we're going to grow 50,000 jobs in green energy over the next three years. That's something that my parliamentary assistant is working hard to try to promote; that's something I'm proud to work hard to try to promote; that's something that will certainly be a legacy of this government. Fifty thousand jobs over three years in the green energy economy: That's something we're very proud of.

BIODIVERSITY

Mr. Glen R. Murray: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, your ministry is responsible for administering Ontario's vast crown land resources and ensuring the sustainable management of all of the flora and fauna within Ontario. Protecting Ontario's amazing biodiversity of species—cougars, trilliums, sturgeon and other at-risk species—is in the interests of all Ontarians.

Ontario's biodiversity is something we can all be proud of, but very often people do not know first-hand about the species that your ministry works daily to protect. How does the ministry communicate with the public about protecting Ontario's biodiversity for future generations to enjoy?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question. He is absolutely correct: Protecting Ontario's biodiversity is in all of our interests. I think many Ontarians, including the members here in this Legislature, will be shocked to know that within a 100-kilometre radius of this Legislature, there are 100 species at risk in Ontario.

My ministry strives to make sure Ontarians and the industry are aware of biodiversity. We have an annual presence at the Toronto Sportsmen's Show and we work with partners like the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters to make sure that those who do interact with our biodiversity are aware of the world around them.

There's one initiative that I'm particularly proud of. Just last week, my ministry introduced the Ontario endangered species of the day widget for computers. I'd be happy to elaborate about the widget in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Glen R. Murray: My thanks to the minister. I understand that the Ministry of Natural Resources's species-at-risk widget has set the Internet on fire, and the popularity has surprised those in your ministry who helped to design and develop it. I know many watching at home will know first-hand what a widget is and I am sure there are many who have already downloaded it. However, as Ontarians have differing levels of computer literacy, is the widget for everyone?

Would the minister share with our honourable colleagues what a widget is and tell our colleagues assembled here what makes it so unique?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm very proud of the work and the creativity that my ministry staff have gone through to develop this piece of software. I too did not know what a widget was, but I am told the widget is the first of its kind for the Ontario government, and it is for everyone.

It's a small computer program that can run on a desktop or is embedded in a website, and it's easily shared on social media such as Twitter, Digg or Facebook. The widget updates daily with a picture and facts about a species at risk in Ontario. When a person downloads the widget and explores the different species at risk, they can be redirected to my ministry's species-at-risk page for further detailed information.

After originally sharing the species-at-risk widget through my Twitter account, it was subsequently picked up by apple.com, the company behind the famous iPod. Today, the widget is still featured on apple.com and is the eighth most popular—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the finance minister. Dalton McGuinty doesn't have an economic plan that can be trusted. In his 2007 throne speech, Dalton McGuinty said he had a five-point economic plan to create jobs, not to be confused with his five-point jobs plan in budget 2009. But neither plan was credible. One hundred and forty thousand jobs were lost last year under the McGuinty Liberals. Now you say, "Trust us. Our five-year economic plan will create jobs." Why should Ontario families believe you?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member might have missed it: There was a global downturn in the economy since the last throne speech. You might have missed the meltdown in international financial markets. You might have missed the downturn in the auto sector. You certainly voted against helping keep those jobs in Windsor and Brampton and Oshawa. You might have missed the challenges with our tax system, because one day you'd say you'd support the HST and then the next day you wouldn't support it.

This weekend the leader of the Conservative Party is in Ottawa, saying, "Spend more money on hospitals," and on Monday they release a report saying, "Free spending."

We have responded to a changing global economy with a clear vision, working with our federal counterparts to create jobs and a better economy for Ontario. That member and his party have no plan, no idea what to do other than to say, "Wasn't it good under Mike Harris—"

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Start the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That's not helpful, member from Cambridge.

I will remind the honourable members that if they choose to interject in the proceedings, it is much more helpful to the Speaker that they be sitting in their seats.

Supplementary.

Mr. Norm Miller: Perhaps I should remind the finance minister that Ontario lost 200,000 jobs before the recession started.

There are two things Dalton McGuinty likes in a plan: The number 5, and not being pinned down on creating jobs. In budget 2009, the Premier said he would create 146,000 new full-time jobs and 100,000 student jobs this year, but he didn't. He also said he would create 168,000 jobs next year, plus 50,000 so-called green energy jobs, 800 Ubisoft jobs, 16,000 Samsung jobs and 600,000 HST jobs. Dalton McGuinty knows how to promise a million jobs; he just don't know how to create them.

In the interest of accountability, do you attribute the 140,000 lost jobs to the five-point economic plan, the five-point jobs plan, the five-year economic plan or all of the above?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Who I will attribute the 600,000 jobs figure is to is the Conservative Party's expert witness at last year's SCOFEA hearings, Mr. Jack Mintz. That's not us; that's them. That's their expert witness.

1110

I have to tell you, the member opposite wants to go back to closing 39 hospitals. They want to go back to calling nurses hula-hoop workers. They want to go back to an era when there was no freedom of information or accountability for the hydro companies. We don't want to do that, and I know the people of Ontario don't want to do that.

I am pleased, however, that the member opposite, just last week in committee hearings, finally agreed with our tax policy. He said, "We're in favour of those reductions for ... small business and the corporate tax rates." It's unfortunate that he and his party voted against it. It's unfortunate that they don't have a plan for the future. All they have is an eye for the past, a past that has been—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Ontarians have waited six years for the McGuinty government to deliver a long-term housing plan. Now, just before the plan is due, the original minister resigned from cabinet and key staff have been dismissed. The former parliamentary secretary went so far as to express his dismay publicly, stating that Mr. McGuinty's moves mean "that expertise and continuity is now lost." Housing groups are extremely concerned that the report will be delayed or reduced in scope. They want to know—it's simple: Will this plan still be released in June?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thank the member for the question. Usually, I wouldn't thank them for their ques-

tion, but this is a good opportunity to speak about something we're really pleased about, and that's the kind of consultation that took place for this plan. I have had an opportunity to receive input from a number of different sectors in this regard. We are, at the present time, assessing all the information that came in as a result of that consultation and are developing this long-term strategy.

That hasn't prevented us, as you know, from allocating some \$622 million for affordable housing and encouraging the federal government to do the same. There's some significant progress being made.

I know that when your leader moves a person from one seat to another, or from one position to another, I wouldn't comment on that because that's the prerogative of your leader, and I have a lot of respect for her. When she makes those changes, I'm not here to comment—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I take it that the answer is that the report will not be released in June.

When a parliamentary assistant says something is "really, really wrong" in a ministry, there are real problems. Rents and house prices in Ontario are the least affordable. We have the greatest deficit in affordable housing. Per capita, we invest the least in housing.

There is widespread concern that the ministry lacks resources to tackle a housing crisis and to deliver a strong plan. The Housing Network of Ontario has called for a budget commitment to ensure that Ontario delivers at least 10,000 affordable housing units this year. Will the minister agree to this?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, the member has been a member of this House for some period of time now, and she would know that I can't say what's going to be in the budget ahead of time; that's something that you will have to wait for the budget for. I know she's a patient person and is prepared to do that.

I can assure her that all of the input that we've received, including the input from those who have had the position of parliamentary assistant in years gone by—parliamentary secretaries are very, very helpful federally and provincially in providing information. I can tell her that all of the information from the consultation will be used and that we've already committed \$1.2 billion to housing in this province. I don't want to say that's far more than the NDP did, because that's history and we're in different circumstances. But the fact is, it is more than the NDP committed.

I know she'll support our program. I'm confident she'll support our program when she sees the plan put before—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Mr. Ted McMeekin: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, today we know it's more important than ever to ensure that students are successful in

school in order to be successful in finding work and to become valuable members of the Ontario workforce. But Minister, sometimes obstacles come into the way of high school students and their goal of graduating and moving on to post-secondary education or the workforce.

We know that statistics and studies have shown that people who graduate from high school are more likely to earn more money, less likely to receive unemployment and social assistance payments and less likely to be in trouble with the law. With these factors in mind, our government has placed increased emphasis on engaging students so they can stay in school and graduate. Minister, could you enlighten us as to some of our recent successes with respect to the student success strategy?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Good question.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: It is a very good question, because I know everyone in this assembly is absolutely focused on ensuring that we're doing everything we can as a government so that our young people can be successful in school. That is why we have made the investments that we have and that is why we have introduced some new programs.

What I can say is that we have developed new programs that give students more ways to accumulate credits. We have been making significant progress since 2003, and we have also invested \$1.5 billion to support programs such as the specialist high skills major program, such as dual credits and expanded co-op.

Our investments are having results. Since 2003, we have had more graduates in our schools. In fact, we have 13,500 more students graduating from high school than when we came to government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I'm particularly interested in the specialist high skills major initiatives and how they seem to grow a different set of specialty courses each year. This year in my riding of Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale, we launched a specialist high skills major in aviation and aerospace.

I'd like the minister to let members of the House know where these programs are being offered, what other innovative majors are being offered by Ontario high schools and how many students are participating in this innovative new approach to keeping students in school and making sure they graduate.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We have had some tremendous success, and what I can say to the members of this House is that all 70 school boards with secondary schools are offering specialist high skills major programs. In fact, I was at T.A. Blakelock in Oakville this morning with my colleague the member from Oakville and I had the opportunity to see first-hand a specialist high skills major program at work.

We offer this specialist program in many areas. I know we have visitors here from the agriculture community; we are offering specialist programs for students in the area of agriculture, in the areas of arts and culture, the

environment, health and wellness, as well as aviation, aeronautics and energy.

This type of programming has been very successful. We now have over 20,000 students who are choosing this type of program so they have an understanding and a sense of what is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Energy use in Ontario has shown a steady decline since 2005, when the peak surge was 27,000 megawatts. In 2009, the peak surge was just over 22,000 megawatts, and the years in between have shown a steady decline.

Minister, with declining demand, is it really necessary to build the Oakville gas-fired power plant?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I appreciate this question because it gives me an opportunity to publicly thank and commend our colleague Kevin Flynn, the MPP for that area. I want to thank him for his efforts to ensure that the voice of his community is being brought to this chamber. I want to thank him for his efforts to work very closely with me to ensure that any of the concerns being expressed in this area about that project are being brought to our attention.

I can assure the member opposite and I can assure the member from Oakville that I will continue to listen very carefully to the concerns being expressed. We will certainly not ignore those concerns. We respect the voices from the community and we'll do all that we can to ensure that any of the concerns raised are fully addressed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Today, hundreds of Oakville residents are coming to Queen's Park to protest the construction of one of the largest gas-fired power plants in North America. The Oakville-Clarkson airshed is already one of the worst in Ontario, causing the highest incidence of childhood respiratory diseases in the province. And yet a full and independent individual environmental assessment has not been done on this site.

Minister, your government has said that it cares about health and safety. How can you move forward with this power plant without an individual environmental assessment?

Hon. Brad Duguid: As always, the party opposite simply refuses to change their policy. They wanted this province to stick to dirty coal. They haven't changed their policy one bit. We are for change. We recognize the move to diversify our power mix. We recognize the need to diversify our energy supply. We recognize the need to attract green energy to this province. We recognize the need to invest in the modernization of our nuclear capability, because that is emission free.

We're determined to move from coal, and there are some tough decisions that will need to be made going

forward. But I can assure the people from Oakville that we will make sure their voice is heard, we will listen to their concerns, and we'll ensure that we move forward in a responsible but decisive manner.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Health. I've always enjoyed good literature, but I'd like to suggest that we abstain from relying too heavily on Orwellian language when we talk about our health care system. Yesterday, the minister told reporters that 190 jobs that she's cutting at the Ottawa Hospital will somehow improve patient care. "We absolutely expect that quality of care will improve," the minister said in a story headlined: "Cuts at the Ottawa Hospital Will Improve Care, Minister Says."

I'd like to think not even this government would suggest that slashing 190 health care jobs somehow improves care for Ontario families. Would the minister like to clarify her comments in that regard in the House today?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will remind the member opposite that I actually don't write the headlines; in fact, the headline did not reflect what I said.

Having said that, it's time to get the facts straight here. Reports that the Ottawa Hospital is laying off large numbers of nurses is simply not true. Like hospitals across the province, the Ottawa Hospital is making the changes that are necessary to improve efficiency, while at the same time continuing to improve patient care. There are almost 200 nursing vacancies at the Ottawa Hospital right now. While 48 nurses may be affected by the upcoming changes at the hospital, there are more than enough vacancies to absorb all of those changes.

Dr. Jack Kitts, the CEO of the Ottawa Hospital, has said that "very few if any nurses at TOH will leave involuntarily."

It's important that we work together to make the changes that are necessary in our health care system—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: While the health minister weaves a wonderful fairy tale about health care getting better, the fact is that this government's cuts will make health care worse in this province. Families in Ottawa are rightfully worried when they learn that several hundred health care jobs are being eliminated, at a time that the system is already so strained that surgeries are being deferred and services are being cut back. Families in Ottawa deserve much, much better than this.

Will the minister commit today to putting Ottawa families first and rethinking these disastrous job cuts that will only compromise their health care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to invite the member opposite to actually review the facts on this case. I think it's important to repeat that, according to Jack Kitts, "very few if any nurses ... will leave involuntarily."

We are not cutting services to health care. In Ottawa, we've increased funding to hospitals by \$408 million. We've provided money to bring down wait times and support services outside the hospital.

It might be helpful to just review the NDP record. The NDP actually closed 8,000 hospital beds. The NDP cut the number of medical school spaces, contributing greatly to the physician shortage that we have worked hard to repair.

The upcoming changes at the Ottawa Hospital will actually increase the number of beds for acute care patients. It will maintain current level of patient service for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ANIMAL HEALTH

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Food safety and quality are of great importance to the agriculture sector, as well as the broader general public. Agriculture representatives from both the poultry and livestock sectors have been asking for some time for implementation of animal health legislation like that seen in Alberta and Quebec.

Coming from Guelph, I've had the opportunity to speak with experts from the Ontario Veterinary College, the Ontario Agricultural College and the Guelph Food Technology Centre, and I know that protecting farm animal health is important both in terms of food safety and the economic well-being of the agriculture industry.

Minister, could you inform the House about the economic benefits of the Animal Health Act that was proclaimed into force earlier this year?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Thank you for the question. The livestock and poultry industries are vital contributors to Ontario's economy, and because of this, we have taken steps to protect these sectors.

The Animal Health Act is the result of requests and consultation with our industry partners, and that certainly bears repeating. This new legislation embraces industry competitiveness by providing a framework for traceability measures to improve market access opportunities that better align with other provinces. It protects animal health and the economy.

The act includes legislative powers that provide for: prevention measures, including a framework for enhanced efforts to protect animals from hazards, proper animal handling at specific premises and proper use of medicines; detection, including disease monitoring at specific locations; and appropriate actions to control or mitigate the effects of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Ontario's agri-food sector is one of the province's leading industries, contributing more than \$33 billion to the economy every year.

To keep Ontario food safe, we must all take steps to produce, process, handle and store food in a way that prevents or reduces any danger to human health. Mistakes and missteps not only damage a farm or a processor's reputation, they can cost lives. That's why everyone in the agri-food chain, from those who grow and process our food to those who sell it—everyone needs to participate.

I've spoken with farmers who appreciate the direction that our government has taken in partnering and working closely with them to help meet the challenges facing the sector. Could the minister please provide this House with more information about how the Animal Health Act makes Ontario food safe?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Protecting livestock and poultry is not just important for the economic well-being of the industry. We know there's a link between animal health and human health, and protecting our food animals can help us protect ourselves.

The Animal Health Act is just another tool for Ontario's food safety system, one which already includes comprehensive inspection systems that make sure that unhealthy animals don't enter the human food chain. It helps to address animal health issues that could have an effect on public health.

We know that having healthy animals is a first step to having quality food products, and this legislation adds an additional level of security to the system. This benefits the public by increasing consumer confidence which, in turn, benefits the industry.

Food safety strengthens our agricultural community, and the members on that side of the House just simply don't get it. We know the linkage is strong. We have to ensure—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Acting Premier. Last year, on June 10, the Waterloo Region Record reported the Premier's statement that hospital expansion might be included in a 10-year construction plan, which was to be unveiled last fall. It's now the beginning of March of the following year. When does the Premier really plan to unveil his now 11-year construction plan for hospitals?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to have an opportunity to talk about the extraordinary expansion we've made in our health care infrastructure right across the province. We are committed to going forward. We are currently undertaking the important work that's necessary to develop the next 10-year capital plan. But I think that anyone would say that across this province there has been an extraordinary improvement in the infrastructure of our hospitals and our health care system.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm not satisfied with the answer, and I understand that there are some 70 communities waiting for this government to get moving on their hospital redevelopment projects. Groves Memorial Community Hospital in the township of Centre Wellington is one of those 70 hospitals. We've been working for more than seven years, and our patients are, well, running out of patience. What assurances can the Acting Premier provide my constituents that the Groves project will finally move forward, and when?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I appreciate that there are many members in this House who are hoping to have capital projects approved in their constituency. When we came into office, there was a massive health infrastructure deficit across this province. We, after years of neglect, undertook ReNew Ontario, a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure plan. We've seen over 100 major hospital projects underway in this province. We've increased health care spending by 45%. We are committed to continuing to improve the infrastructure of our health care system, and we are taking the time necessary to do that right.

TERMINATION AND SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. A few weeks ago, the McGuinty Liberals suddenly found \$200 million for the underfunded Nortel pension plan, just after a by-election was called in the Ottawa West riding, where thousands of Nortel retirees live.

My question is: Can the Acting Premier tell us when the McGuinty Liberals will show the same concern for the 2,000 laid-off workers of the Buchanan Group of Companies in northwestern Ontario, who are legally entitled to \$30 million in severance and termination pay under the laws of Ontario, and who have received nothing?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much—

Hon. Dwight Duncan: She said "finance."

Hon. Michael Gravelle: "Finance"? Go ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There are a variety of challenges, as the member well knows. This government—I know the Minister of Labour and our officials, as well as the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines—will be involved. We did, in fact, move to protect Nortel pensioners. I think it's important to say that today. I regret the NDP opposed that, I regret that you would see that as something we shouldn't have done in this climate. We have taken great caution moving forward on pensions and benefit issues to protect vulnerable workers, and we will continue to do that in all instances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: What's striking is, the McGuinty Liberals showed no interest in the retirees or ex-workers of Nortel until a by-election was called in a Liberal riding. But what's even more outrageous is that over the last three years, the McGuinty Liberals have given over \$120 million in grants, loans and other financial benefits to the Buchanan Group of Companies. Oh, yes—the Buchanan Group of Companies has given tens of thousands of dollars to the Liberal Party. So my question is this: While you were handing out \$120 million to the Buchanan Group of Companies, did anybody over there—the Minister of Forestry, the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Natural Resources—say that \$30 million of it should go to the workers who were entitled to severance and termination pay under the laws of Ontario? Did anybody speak up for the workers?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we have worked with a number of companies in the north. The member opposite tries to have it both ways. For the last four years, he has been telling us to help the forest and pulp and paper industry. He has been telling us to work and to put money into that. Frankly, he was right about that. That's why we have responded with a variety of programs in the forestry sector, and we will continue to do that. That is why we worked with the Nortel pensioners for more than a year. This didn't just happen. In fact, had we triggered something sooner, it would have been really devastating for Nortel workers.

We will work with those workers and any displaced worker. That's why we have a jobs plan. It's about jobs; it's about a fair shake for working people. We'll continue to work with our partners in labour and business to help build the best economy we can for the people of Ontario.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. A recent report by Dr. Rick Miner, who is the former president of Seneca College in my riding of Willowdale, stresses the need to incorporate under-represented skilled professions into Ontario's job market and to ensure that Ontario's future labour needs are met. Quite specifically, Dr. Miner focused on skilled newcomers in our province who continue to face barriers to employment. One of the key obstacles he cited was a lack of appropriate language skills.

I know the government is committed to helping newcomers. I've read the report. It does underscore the opportunities at stake and the need to ensure that newcomers have language skills. Minister, what is our government doing to ensure that immigrants get the language skills they need to specifically integrate into Ontario's workforce?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would like to thank the member from Willowdale for his question. This government understands that learning English and French is often key to finding a job and being successful in the workplace. That's why our government is investing over \$64 million each year to help more than 120,000 newcomers get the

language training they need, including nearly \$10 million in language and occupational-specific language training to help workers get the skills that they require in language training. We're also working with the federal government to ensure seamless access to language training for learners and consistency in language-level assessments. As a government, we are dedicated to helping newcomers contribute to a stronger Ontario.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: My point of order relates to the literally hundreds of written questions that have been tabled with the House. As you will know, on prorogation, all of those questions die.

I know that in the motion for prorogation, the Premier has stated clearly that he intends not to disrupt the business of the House. Given that it was probably an oversight that those written questions were not included in the order to carry over into the new session, I would ask for unanimous consent for a motion that would carry over all of those written questions that have been tabled so that we don't have to reset the starting date for those questions. I would like to have unanimous consent to make that motion.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member from Newmarket–Aurora seeks unanimous consent to carry over the questions. Agreed? I heard a no.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Thornhill has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade concerning Grant Forest Products and Ontario's forest industry. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1500.

ESTIMATES

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I have a message from the Honourable David Onley, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2010, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly. Dated March 2, 2010.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd like to thank the residents of Oakville who came out today to protest on the front lawn

about the building of a power plant in their community. There were young people there. There were old people there. There were all kinds of residents of Oakville there, including Pinball Clemens, whom I was very pleased to see. There were over 1,200 people on a Tuesday at noon, and they filled the front lawn. They were wondering why you would build a power plant of this magnitude that is three kilometres from 11,000 homes, 16 schools, five seniors' homes and eight daycare centres. In the middle of all this, there's going to be a power plant.

Along with the building of the power plant, there's a serious question about the air quality. The Clarkson–Oakville airshed is already seriously impacted with the highest incidence of childhood respiratory diseases in the province. An individual environmental assessment has not been done on this site. How this government can claim to be environmentally sensitive without an individual environmental assessment of this plant—the need for power is somewhat questioned.

Minister Duguid said he would listen to the people of Oakville, but he wasn't there to hear them, and he's continuing not to hear them.

The people of Oakville are to be congratulated.

PUBLIC SKATING EVENTS

Mr. Bob Delaney: In January, I shared a public skate with an estimated 250 constituents in western Mississauga at the Vic Johnston arena in the heart of Streetsville.

Co-sponsored with my federal counterpart, member of Parliament Bonnie Crombie, constituents were invited to a free skate and hot chocolate and cookies. As some of my legislative colleagues know, I'm celebrating my 50th season of playing hockey. It's very special to lace up the blades and skate with residents, young and old.

The public skate promoted healthy activity for families in the area and encouraged our constituents to meet face to face with their federal and provincial representatives. In fact, the provincial skate was such a success that we decided to host an encore event this month. Along with Mississauga Ward 9 city councillor, Pat Saito, I'm going to host another family skate on Sunday, March 21, from 2 to 4:30 p.m. at Meadowvale 4 Rinks at Turner Valley Road, near Mississauga Road and Erin Mills Parkway.

I invite our western Mississauga residents to join Councillor Saito and me at Meadowvale 4 Rinks. You don't have to be a good skater; you just have to come out. And if you do want to come out and skate, Councillor Saito and I would be very pleased to come and have a skate with you.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to rise and bring to the attention of this House some of the great work of Clarington's voice of business for the 2010 budget. Sheila Hall, executive director of the board, has shared with me the Clarington Board of Trade's pre-budget

submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—and I congratulate her on making that presentation.

The Clarington Board of Trade represents about 360 businesses in my riding of Durham. Its president is Elaine Garnett. The businesses, along with me, are advocating for completion of the 407 and new-build nuclear, as well as supporting serviced lands to support investments in Ontario in that region. That is why one of the budget priorities for the Clarington Board of Trade is to develop programs to support the serving of employment lands and, indeed, jobs. The board of trade is optimistic that additional serviced land will build on existing infrastructure investments and further strengthen the local economy.

I would urge the McGuinty government to take the advice of the Clarington Board of Trade on this initiative. That will create jobs and investments not only in Clarington, but, indeed, throughout Ontario.

I've always found that working with small business to help grow the economy is the way to go, and I don't think the Premier is listening to small business any longer. All he's listening to are Samsung and other foreign investments. I'm disappointed. Listen up to the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I rise today to bring the attention of the House to more good news for Algoma-Manitoulin, particularly the communities of Blind River and Elliot Lake.

Less than two weeks ago, the community of Blind River celebrated a rural economic development, or RED, program grant of \$41,000. The money goes to support the Blind River health centre to develop and administer a registered practical nursing program, recruit and retain RPNs and assist local personal support workers who wish to transition to nursing. As Mary Ellen Luukkonen, the chief nursing officer of the hospital, said, "We warmly welcome the province and Sault College as partners in helping develop a local solution to our nursing shortage."

Last Thursday, I joined Todd Stencil of the chamber of commerce; Dan Gagnon of the city of Elliot Lake; Sean Hurd from the Elliot Lake and North Shore Corporation for Business Development; and Bob Sjonnesen from the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry in announcing \$165,000 from the RED program. This project builds on a three-year commitment from the community and the province to deliver a market-driven, comprehensive downtown revitalization project.

Congratulations to both communities, and special thanks to the Honourable Carol Mitchell, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, for her support of these projects.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Toby Barrett: I've contacted the Ministry of Transportation regarding the deplorable conditions

residents of Haldimand-Norfolk have been forced to endure while driving on provincial Highway 6 between Jarvis and Port Dover. I'd like to make members aware of what has become rural road rage in my area.

I've lived on Cockshutt Road—it's just to the west of Highway 6—all my life so far. In 1957, I watched Cockshutt Road get redone and paved, and some 50 years later, it's holding up pretty well. However, in 1994 we were NDP locally and provincially. I also recall the repaving job of provincial Highway 6 between Jarvis and Port Dover.

My question: What happened? The road is collapsing. We'd like to know what's under that asphalt. As an editorial in the recent edition of the Port Dover Maple Leaf cites, "If highways had a theme song, 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' would be a fitting condemnation of the 15-kilometre stretch of highway."

Or as someone else put forward in a letter to the editor, it has "heaved so much in the last few years that it is like driving on speed bumps doing 80 kilometres per hour."

I will just reiterate my plea to the Legislature. This was a question in the letter to the editor: "Am I asking too much for the road to be fixed?"

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Bill Mauro: I am happy to note that four- and five-year-old students in my riding will start full-day kindergarten this September. It's of course a completely voluntary program, and parents will have the opportunity or choice to enrol their children if they so choose.

A number of schools will be offering this program to the children in my community, and they are among the 35,000 young students in communities all across Ontario who will be enrolled in this program this fall.

All of these students will receive a very high-quality early learning program. It has been proven in studies to provide many long-term benefits in cognitive and social skills. Students who participate in early learning programs are more likely to succeed in their education, graduate, earn a post-secondary degree and have successful careers.

1510

I'm very excited about this, and I can tell you that in my riding, there are a number of schools that will be offering the program: McKellar Park in Thunder Bay, Lakehead District School Board; Sherbrooke school, the same school board; Westmount in Thunder Bay—Atikokan, the same school board; St. Patrick's School in Atikokan, part of the Northwest Catholic District School Board; also in Atikokan, the North Star Community School, and that's part of the Rainy River District School Board; and finally, also back in Thunder Bay—Atikokan, is St. Vincent School, a school that I had the opportunity to attend many years ago when I had a great principal there by the name of John Schelling. I was very fortunate to have had that opportunity.

So I had two great events in Thunder Bay announcing this, and I look forward to the beginning of this program this fall.

ENERGY RETAILERS

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to rise today in the House to welcome Ontario's leading energy retailers to Queen's Park. Direct Energy, Just Energy, Summit Energy and Superior Energy provide employment to over 3,500 people directly in Ontario and create hundreds of spinoff green energy jobs.

They are here today to communicate to government their shared interest in Ontario's culture of conservation, along with their desire to ensure that consumer protection and choice is significantly enhanced in Ontario. These energy retailers see the Ontario market as a key part of the North American portfolio. They want to ensure a vibrant market in Ontario and one that is conducive to further investments.

A reception is being held today from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. in committee room 228, and all MPPs are invited to attend this event to learn about the energy retail sector's consumer protection initiatives, their contribution to the success of Ontario's economy, along with their desire to grow supports for a very green future for the people of Ontario.

OLYMPIC ATHLETES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's with great enthusiasm and pride that I rise today to salute and thank our Canadian Olympic athletes. What an incredible two weeks we had through the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, where we really demonstrated to the world how great Canada is and how superb our athletes are.

It was just an incredible event, and I think the result was clear: We won 14 gold medals as a nation, the most any country has ever won, and we have gained a new sense of pride as Canadians.

I think the game on Sunday will be in our memories for a very, very long time. What a nail-biter game. We're proud of our Canadian men's Olympic hockey team for bringing that gold at that last minute.

There were 48 members from Ontario as part of Team Canada. As many of the members know, I have a bias towards Ottawa, so I do want to recognize some of the athletes from Ottawa who were great in these Olympics: John Morris, who is an Ottawa native, won the gold medal in men's curling; Dan Boyle, who was part of the gold-medal men's hockey team; Kristina Groves, who won two medals, a silver medal and a bronze medal, in long-track speed skating; also, we had Robin Clegg from Ottawa—whose mother, Cindy Clegg, is a very good friend of mine—in biathlon; Perianne Jones of Almonte; and Patrick Biggs of Orléans.

Our heartiest congratulations to the whole Canadian Olympic team. Thank you very much for making us proud.

TAXATION

Mr. Howard Hampton: Virtually every week, we hear members of the McGuinty government talk about this government's new relationship with First Nations.

I recently had the opportunity to spend some time with a number of First Nations communities in my constituency, and they continue to ask about this so-called new relationship. They, in particular, ask how a government could sign an agreement in the backroom to create the harmonized sales tax and, in process, take away the point-of-sale exemption from First Nations—without any consultation, without any notice, without any discussion and without any dialogue whatsoever with First Nations.

Then, when they find that a \$100 tank of gas will now become \$113 with the HST, a \$300 hydro bill will become a \$339 hydro bill with the HST, vitamins at \$50 will become vitamins at \$56.50 with the HST, and \$200 to have your vehicle towed will become \$226 with the HST. First Nations who live on limited incomes wonder, how could any government do this to them with no dialogue, no discussion, no consultation, and then have the nerve to stand up and boast about a new relationship with First Nations?

PETITIONS

ELMVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Elmvale District High School is an important part of the community of Elmvale and surrounding area; and

"Whereas the school is widely recognized as having high educational requirements and is well known for producing exceptional graduates who have gone on to work as professionals in health care, agriculture, community safety, the trades and many other fields that give back to the community; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised during the 2007 election that he would keep rural schools open when he declared that 'Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them'; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty found \$12 million to keep school swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn't found any money to keep an actual rural school open in Elmvale;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Education support the citizens of Elmvale and flow funding to the local school board so that Elmvale District High School can remain open to serve the vibrant community of Elmvale and surrounding area."

I will sign this petition and I agree with it.

SOUND BARRIERS

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas we, residents of the affected neighbourhood, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly take the action necessary to replace the sound barrier on the north side of Highway 401 from the westbound entrance of Highway 401 to approximately the intersection of Ridley Boulevard and Delhi Avenue, Toronto.

"The barriers immediately east and west of our neighbourhood have been replaced, providing our neighbours additional quiet enjoyment. We request that we be afforded the same consideration. The highway noise continues to increase and it has been proven that the existing steel barriers do not provide the same noise reduction qualities as new currently available barrier systems.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To replace the existing steel barriers with a new noise-reducing barrier."

I have affixed my signature to this petition.

POWER PLANT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it's written out by hand. It's the first petition I've had that has been written out by hand, and it's in the proper form.

"Whereas the province of Ontario, through the Ontario Energy Board, has selected a location for a gas-fired electrical generating power station within three kilometres of 16 schools and more than 11,000 homes; and

"Whereas the Oakville-Clarkson airshed is already one of the most polluted in Canada; and

"Whereas no independent environmental assessment has been completed for this proposed building location; and

"Whereas Ontario has experienced a significant reduction in demand for electrical power; and

"Whereas a recent accident at a power plant in Connecticut demonstrated the dangers that nearby residents face;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to immediately rescind the existing plan to build a power plant at or near the current planned location on lands ... on Royal Windsor Drive in Oakville and initiate a complete review of area power needs and potential building sites, including environmental assessments and a realistic assessment of required danger zone buffer areas."

It's signed by Marie-Anne Neumayer, and I want to thank her for taking the time to send that in. As I agree with the petition, I will sign it and pass it to my page, Julia.

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I am tabling this petition on behalf of the Minister of Revenue, the MPP for Perth-Wellington.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas to cover the cost of reconstructive surgery when a patient has had extreme weight loss after bariatric surgery, as these surgeries are not covered under OHIP and are at present considered cosmetic;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That when patients have bariatric surgery and lose the required amount of weight and keep it off, they also have another set of health care issues that can be very costly to take care of. As these individuals lose weight, they end up with so much excess skin and fat pockets that no amount of exercise will take care of it. This excess skin and folds in the skin can cause anything from boils, cysts, skin infections and more that have to be cared for constantly in hospital emergency rooms and cared for by agencies like community care access centres. If preventative reconstructive surgeries are not approved, the constant medical care will cost the taxpayer much more money as said health issues would cost over time."

I affix my signature and send this petition to the table via page Julian.

1520

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition from the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy"—and use—"every day. A few examples include: coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming"—personal care—"home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements," and the list goes on, and many of the Liberals now are angry about it—they're barking, anyway;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in" the dreaded health tax, which now costs up to \$900 per individual, and now he is going to raise your taxes again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes" on families in Ontario and the businesses in Ontario.

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to the constituent Quinton in his second-last week here at Queen's Park.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to read this petition on behalf of my colleague and seatmate, the member for

Niagara Falls. I especially want to thank Grace Bennett and Sharon Fedor for having gathered some of the signatures on his particular petition. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

On behalf of the member for Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to ask page Amy to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Cathy Scott of Wasaga Beach for sending this petition to me.

"Whereas the hard-working residents of Simcoe-Grey do not want a harmonized sales tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, house sales over \$400,000, fast food ... electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than \$30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I will sign that petition and I agree with it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 16, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act / Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale et la Loi sur le financement des élections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Another one of these bifurcated debates—this time, I have exactly half the time left.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes. I'm pleased that my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party appreciate the use of the word.

On the last occasion, I had an opportunity to talk about what was good with the bill and what was bad with the bill, and today I hope to continue with what has been left out of the bill, which is very unfortunate.

Just to reiterate, I talked about the three things contained within the body of the bill that I thought were actually quite helpful, quite good and quite forward thinking. Those were: the special ballots that are going to be allowed in order that people will have an opportunity to vote by way of the special ballot; the opportunity for students to vote not only where they're going to school, but in their home ridings—I told the story about my having to get on a train in Ottawa many years ago and come to Toronto in order not to miss my first vote, which was very special and important to me, and the expense of it all in those days. The third one is the depoliticizing of the poll workers, which I think is long overdue. Gone are those days of government largesse—or the opposition party, if you're lucky enough to have run second in a particular riding, to appoint poll workers. I think we have come to expect a level of expertise and competence that we require of people, and that it is about time people were chosen on the basis of their ability, as opposed to the party they have supported in the past.

Then I went on after that to talk about some of the things I thought were missing, although they were discussed during the special committee known as the Sorbara committee: things like municipalities not being included; things like the minister not changing the rules by which corporations and unions are allowed to give a great deal of their funding; things like the province of Ontario falling way behind other jurisdictions, particularly the federal jurisdiction, the Quebec and Manitoba jurisdictions, which give public financing for municipalities. I went on to talk about real-time disclosure and how that is not happening and how some parties, particularly the government party, funnel money through riding associations so that the disclosure does not have to take place in real time.

Oh, I see my friend the member from Vaughan is here. My goodness. He has arrived.

I talked about the citizens' juries and the farcical machinations they had to go through in the most recent vote on changing the electoral rules in the province of Ontario and the first-past-the-post system—a 60% vote was necessary, plus 50% in at least 64 ridings—how very few other jurisdictions around the world do that. We recognize “one member, one vote,” we recognize that the majority rules, but impossible conditions are put down here when citizens come up with a good idea.

I closed by talking a little more about some of the difficulties the government had in not implementing everything that was before the Sorbara committee.

On the last occasion, I promised to spend about a half-hour talking about the last disappointment that I had, and that is around the whole issue of disabilities. We know that a great many more than a million people in the province of Ontario list themselves as having a disability. Whether that is caused from age, infirmity or birth, they have a disability. They ask merely that they be accommodated, so that they can enjoy the same benefits and privileges of every other citizen in this province. They don't want to be special, but they do recognize that from time to time they are going to need accommodation so they can have equality. What they really are asking for in the end is to enjoy the same rights as everyone else. It isn't enough in this bill to simply say that a citizen who is disabled can vote in an advance poll. That is not enough. We know if that was all that citizens had to do, every one of our citizens would vote in an advance poll. But that's not what happens, and there's a very good reason for that.

1530

Citizens and electors want to be able to watch what is happening in the political process, right up until the very end. Oftentimes, because of the conflicting messages that they're getting or because sometimes it takes a while to get the literature from door to door, an opportunity to meet the candidate or an opportunity to go to an all-candidates' meeting, it literally takes them from the time the election is called to 28 days later to make up their minds.

For those people who have made up their mind in advance, of course an advance poll is good. For those who have no other condition and have to do an advance poll because they're leaving the country or because they're not otherwise available on election day, of course an advance poll is a good thing. But the majority of citizens want to vote on election day. They want to feel part of the history and of the process of actually voting.

We have not done enough in this bill to accommodate people with disabilities. They are very bitter, some of them, about what is not contained in the body of this bill and at the way they were treated, both in the committee and when the issue was put before the appropriate minister.

To go on, this bill does not accomplish what the disabilities community is expecting to have. I have letters

here that were sent to all three parties from ARCH, from the Canadian Hearing Society and, most importantly, I think, in the circumstances of the bill, from David Lepofsky, who is the chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. They are saying quite convincingly and very strongly that they do not believe that this bill accommodates the needs of the disabled community.

They talk with some real power about what happened in the by-election in Toronto Centre. We know, if you read the local newspapers, that on that day in February of the Toronto Centre by-election, some of the polls were not accessible to people with disabilities. One person in a wheelchair had to be carried down the stairs when they arrived to vote. Thankfully, that person was more than happy to be accommodated in that way, although I am sure that that would not have been the first choice. I am sure that there was a certain degree of angst and trouble about having to be carried into a polling station and not being able to get there of your own strength, your own volition, or about the accommodation that should have been there, either a ramp or an elevator. If it was truly to be accessible, that was not going to happen. I know that David Lepofsky wrote to the government and said that this has to be the very last election in which such things are not done.

It is possible to accommodate people in wheelchairs. It is possible to accommodate the deaf and hard-of-hearing. It is possible to accommodate those who do not have good vision or who are blind. It is possible to accommodate all manner of disabilities, whether visible or invisible. But there has to be a commitment from the government to do so. There has to be a legislative effect that will make it possible. This bill does not contain that. This bill and the committee that saw it, the Sorbara committee, did not set their minds to doing this, to going through this.

I'm going to rely here in great part on the letter from Mr. Lepofsky. The first thing he said was that there was no consultation with the Ontario government. He writes to the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur on February 8, 2010, and outlines in his letter precisely what did not happen. “Since the 2007 election, we have repeatedly offered to work with the Ontario government on implementing this commitment. There is no reason why the next municipal elections in 2010 and the next provincial elections in 2011 could not be barrier-free for voters and candidates with disabilities. The Ontario government has had ample time to address this.”

Of course, he is absolutely right. This government has known for months, this government has known for years, that it intended to take action and present a bill such as Bill 231. There has been little or no effort made to accommodate people with disabilities. If there had been, we would not have had the fiasco of Toronto Centre occur. It would not have happened. But it did, which means that Mr. Lepofsky is absolutely right: The Ontario government has not had the kind of consultation process with the disabilities community to make sure that every-

thing is barrier-free and everything is possible for persons with disabilities.

Again, I have to state, and as strongly as I can, they are not looking for something extra. They are looking to have the same rights. All they require is a little accommodation to do so. They have the same rights to show up in the polling station to cast their vote, and they shouldn't have to be carried down a set of stairs when they show up in a wheelchair or a walker unable to accommodate themselves.

Mr. Lepofsky goes on to talk about passing the buck and how this particular committee, the Sorbara committee, attempted to pass the buck when they tried to appear before them. I quote again from his letter: "On April 28, 2009, we appeared before the Select Committee on Elections. Regrettably, after receiving our input, that committee's report did not adopt many of our recommendations. Once that select committee reported, we asked you with whom we should deal to address this issue. In your August 13, 2009, letter to us, you referred us to MPP Greg Sorbara, who chaired the Legislature's Select Committee on Elections. However, as we told your office, Mr. Sorbara had previously told us that he does not have lead responsibility for this, and that after his select committee had submitted its report (which it had rendered in June 2009), it would be up to the government to decide what it will do to achieve accessible elections for voters and candidates with disabilities."

There you go: People with disabilities come before the government and ask to get something done. They are referred in turn to the Sorbara select committee, and they are told by the Sorbara select committee that they have to go back to the government, and then, "Oh, by the way, all the time frames have been over, and it is not possible for it to happen." I think that they have every right to feel aggrieved. I think they have every right to think that no one is paying attention to their issues.

They write again for the third time that there is no input; they have had no input in the legislation. They tried time and again to meet with government members and with bureaucrats who work at Queen's Park. They tried to meet so that the questions and the things they wanted to raise would be reflected in the legislation. Mr. Lepofsky, who is well known and often saluted and introduced in the House by my Liberal colleagues across the way, tried to be invited. He tried to participate. He tried to get his views known and the views of the disabled community, but he was rebuffed at every stage.

I go on to quote his letter: "In December 2009, we were surprised to learn via the Internet that your government introduced Bill 231 into the Legislature, to reform the Ontario election process, including addressing disability accessibility issues. After your government received the June 2009 report of the Select Committee on Elections and received word that we were not happy with how it addressed disability issues, no one in your government consulted us on the preparation of this legislation. This was a dramatic departure from your government's consulting us on various disability accessibility issues."

I do remember Mr. Lepofsky coming before this House. I do remember him coming to committee. I do remember him talking about the accessibility that he had had to the government under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. I remember that he was quite laudatory in terms of how the government listened to the issues. He was quite laudatory of how his input was welcomed and part of the legislation. But it's quite clear that, in the preparation of this bill, he was not consulted. His group was not consulted. People with disabilities were not consulted.

I don't know how the government with a straight face can stand there, as some of the members have, and say, "This is all well and good; we're going to have special ballots," as if that is going to solve the problem. How is it going to solve the problem for people who want to fully participate in the democratic process in the way that every citizen can and does? How is it going to accommodate them to vote on election day? How is it going to accommodate them to get to the polls? This has not been answered and no one has consulted with Mr. Lepofsky or anyone else in the disabled community to find out what their input and their views are.

1540

I think the government has failed miserably when it comes to dealing with disability issues on this particular file. I know that Mr. Lepofsky and others have seen the bill, and they are asking for full public consultation if and when this goes to committee. I can only support that they be listened to. I can only support that this bill be expanded to include a whole section on how the disabled community is to be accommodated to make sure that they have the full rights of every citizen. It is important that they vote. It is important that their views be known, that their candidates be supported and that they have the same right as everyone else. To disallow them would be a huge disservice to all Ontarians.

The disabilities community is asking for three very realistic things. At the outset, they are demanding that the fiasco of February 4, 2010, in the Toronto Centre by-election not be repeated. But they are asking, in order for that not to be repeated, that three things happen. They're asking, first of all, that all barriers be removed in provincial elections; secondly, they are asking that the government use its power to legislate that all barriers be removed in municipal elections; and thirdly, and I think most importantly, they are asking that there be a monitoring and enforcement of the act and of the laws that they don't see here, when and if it is passed.

They are asking as well, in conjunction with that, that the government of Ontario release all of the existing research that has been made available to the bureaucrats and to the ministry to the disabled community, and particularly, if the government of Ontario has that research, which was made available from the United States, that it be released. Because we know that, after the fiasco of the hanging chads in the United States, there was a great deal of consternation and upset that people who were disabled were denied votes, and that the federal government of

that country—of that jurisdiction—has spent millions upon millions of dollars to make sure that the disabled community in the United States has full access to vote. They also want to have a look at some of that information, and I think it's reasonable for them to request it and reasonable for the government, if they have that information, to make it available to Ontarians. Surely, if the government was concerned about how to make elections more open and democratic and available to people with disabilities, they would have that somewhere in a dusty tome or two hanging around in their office.

They are asking, very importantly, that there be public hearings, because, to date, there have not been public hearings, and I want to go back to that. Should this bill pass second reading and be sent for third, then I would think it incumbent upon the government to hold public hearings and to make those public hearings freely accessible. I know they're accessible if they're held in this building, but if they are to travel outside of Toronto, to make sure that they are accessible in every place that it goes. It is not good enough to say that you're going to be holding a hearing in North Bay or in Vaughan or in Sudbury or in Oakville, or—I'm just looking at members who are present here from out of town, from, I don't know, Chatham way. It's not good enough to just say that you're going to be holding those hearings if you cannot ensure that they are accessible to the people of those communities. They are asking for that.

Again, to quote Mr. Lepofsky about the public hearings—and I want to talk from his letter again. He goes back and he says the following: “As indicated in our December 18, 2009 letter to you, the Premier and the municipal affairs minister, we ask you to commit as soon as possible on behalf of your government to holding full, open and accessible public hearings on Bill 231. These public hearings are needed to enable the disability community to have their voices heard at the Legislature on this bill.”

He goes on to say: “The need for your government to move promptly and effectively on this issue is reinforced by the troubling use of an inaccessible polling station during the February 4, 2010 Toronto by-election. We seek your government's leadership by condemning that incident, and by ensuring that Bill 231 includes provisions that will ensure that this never happens again.” They close the letter, “We are writing to both opposition parties to seek their support for public hearings on Bill 231, and for strong amendments to ensure fully accessible municipal and provincial elections.” It's signed:

“David Lepofsky CM, O.Ont.

“Chair, AODA Alliance.”

Copies were sent to everyone, so me standing up here now—this should not be a surprise to the government. You have had this letter for a long time. It was sent to you, to the opposition and to us in the third party. I am standing here, though, as the NDP disabilities critic, to again make the strongest possible case that this be included in the legislation. Of what value is the legislation if all citizens cannot benefit from it? If only some citizens can benefit from it, then it is not good enough.

We have, as I said, more than a million people in the province who list that they have some form of disability. We need to make sure that they have the full rights of citizens of this province and not one bit less, and if this government needs to take some time and hold full public consultations, so be it. If this government needs to take the time to go back and redraft those sections that have been left out—I was going to say inadvertently, but I don't think it was inadvertence; I think that there really wasn't the political will to do so—then go back and do it, because you have that obligation. Those citizens have the right to expect the same from this Legislature as any other citizen.

I would just like to close off, again, by going back to where I started from. I have been speaking for 50 minutes, and I haven't repeated myself once.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm hearing some “ohs.”

I just want to go back and repeat where I started from. This bill is a modest bill. It does a couple of things right: It does have special ballots, it does give opportunities for students to vote in a couple of places—their home poll and their university or college poll—and it depoliticizes the process. But so much more needs to be done. It is not enough to simply introduce little tiny bills, piecemeal, one step at a time, some form of incrementalism. It is important to seize wholeheartedly what needs to be done, to go there and to do it.

This government has the option. You have the power. You have the authority. As an opposition member, I am merely asking that you listen to the debate that is going on out there, that you listen to what the opposition parties have to say, that you listen to the disabilities community, that you listen to those people who will be affected and that you take the necessary steps to hear from them and to make sure that they are accommodated in every way possible.

If that happens, then I would be pleased to support this bill. It's up to you whether or not it gets support from the other side, because if you do the right things, I'm sure all members of the House will accommodate by supporting it. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'd like to thank the member for Beaches–East York for his observations on this particular bill. There's one provision in this bill that I particularly like. The member for Beaches–East York alluded to it; it's the depoliticizing of the process of the appointment of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Now, in the riding that I represent, the electoral officer who had been in place prior to my first election was a very capable lady. Not long after I was elected, I got a call: People were asking if I would say something nice about this person, who wanted to be reappointed. I thought to myself, “Why am I even involved in this?” In point of fact, she is a very competent, very nice person. I said, “I have no particular desire to be involved in this appointment, and I think you should appoint the person on merit.”

I feel much the same way about the idea of sending a list of potential deputy returning officers in my riding in to Elections Ontario. I mean, I did it. I did it because that was what was expected, but I would rather not. I would rather that the campaigns not be involved in the act of being the referee.

1550

So what this bill really does is say that Elections Ontario is an entity that exists apart from the political campaigns, which is exactly how it's supposed to be. We should, in an election, focus on doing the things that we're there to do. While we can get along to a greater or lesser degree for three years and change, in that last six months or so we put on our party colours, go out and talk about the things we want to do, the vision that we have for Ontario, and it's a very adversarial system.

I want to keep my best people for me. I grasp what this bill is trying to do. These are very much-needed reforms, and I look forward to the passage of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I appreciate the comments from the member from Beaches–East York and respect his dogged participation in the process as well.

His comments today, representing David Lepofsky in terms of persons needing to be accommodated—I think section 14 of the bill is clear. It says, “The Chief Electoral Officer is authorized to study methods of improving the voting process and facilitating voting by persons with disabilities. The studies may be conducted by commissioning research and reports, establishing advisory committees and holding conferences.”

In fact, each municipality has a pretty significant role in this. The municipal elections occurring this year have a disability advisory committee by law that gives them some advice, and I think they should work with the local community because it would be wrong to assume that the needs are the same all over the province. To be realistic, the accommodation should be as practical as possible, but is essential, so I comment on the member's role in advocating, and I want to compliment him for that.

But I think the bill fails in some respects as well. It has some good things, and it has some things that are missing. This whole idea of the family coalition funding of third party advertising is being addressed in other provinces. The Working Families Coalition is code language for the unions that supported Dalton McGuinty, and the organizational effects underneath that are something that challenges the very fundamentals of democracy itself. I think it should be strengthened there. We should all have the right to participate in it, and it fails in turning out the vote—this fixed-term election stuff that we're dealing with. The voting turnout has gone down since McGuinty took over. Although I'd like to support the thrust of this, there's not the content that I like.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I listened carefully to the comments by my colleague Mr. Prue, who's the democratic

reform critic for the NDP. Mr. Prue, of course, is the member from Beaches–East York. I also listened carefully to the speech by the member for Willowdale, who gave an excellent discourse on this matter. I know because I spent more than a few hours with him. Howard Hampton was the member of the committee that considered these matters under the leadership, the helmsmanship of Mr. Sorbara, who is the member from Vaughan, you should recall, and who's here with us today and I'm sure will be addressing this bill.

I'm looking forward to speaking to it as well. I have some words for Mr. Zimmer and about him; similarly, some for and about Mr. Sorbara. I have some comments, I suspect, about the Premier and that gaggle of unelected who increasingly dominate policy development here at Queen's Park.

It's interesting because one of the first Premiers, in my experience, who centralized power in the Premier's office and who increasingly used unelected people was that former Liberal Premier, Bob Rae. Now we see his successor Liberal Premier, Dalton McGuinty, compounding those sins as if Mr. McGuinty were like Charlie McCarthy sitting on the knee with Edgar Bergen operating the strings.

I'll be speaking to this, I suppose, in around an hour's time. I hope people will have the—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to rise to make a couple of comments on the member from Beaches–East York in regard to Bill 231. I understand the opposition and third party positions. They're there to try to indicate those things that, as they would say, are missing or we need to do more about. The fact of the matter is, there was a select committee of all three political parties in this House that sat together and worked on this proposed piece of legislation to reform how we vote in this province of Ontario.

I'm going to focus a little bit on what the legislation does. The member from Beaches–East York focused on what the legislation doesn't do.

This legislation, if passed, will allow voters to vote by special ballot. Special ballots will enhance accessibility and convenience for many electors, including persons with disabilities, snowbirds, seniors, and military personnel. What this piece of legislation, if passed, will also do is allow post-secondary students, who in many cases don't go to post-secondary establishments within the riding where they live—I don't have any post-secondary places of education in my riding, so obviously, all my young voters would be somewhere else in Ontario. It was always a lot of work to try to get these kids either to come home or vote by proxy. But now, those young folks who shape our future will have the ability to vote either/or.

I hope we pass this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Beaches–East York has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to thank the members from Mississauga–Streetsville, from Durham, from Welland and from Northumberland–Quinte West for their comments.

In two minutes you don't have much time, but for the member from Streetsville, yes, I tried to speak as forcefully as I could, although not today—on the last occasion. I don't know whether the members had the opportunity to be here on two occasions, but I did try to speak forcefully and in support of the depoliticizing of the positions of people working on election day, particularly because we have come to the maturity that it's no longer seen as some kind of political plum job to be handed out by the party in power or the party that happened to have come second in the last election. It is time to recognize merit and professionalism, and so I welcome this.

Also, to the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, I don't think he was available to hear the beginning of my speech; only the last half. I spent some considerable time talking about special ballots and how they are an important improvement. I talked as well about students being able to vote in two locations, and gave the classic example of myself having to travel from Ottawa to Toronto to exercise my first franchise.

It's important that we looked at the special ballots, the students and the depoliticizing—all of those things. I'm quite conscious that they're good things, but I am on the opposition side; it is my job to tell the government where improvements can be made. Those improvements can be made particularly for people with disabilities, by treating them the same way that everyone else is treating them and by making the accommodation necessary so that they can vote on election day—not just in a special ballot, not just in advance, but on election day itself, at the polls like every other citizen. That's what I tried to emphasize today and that's what I hope the government had an opportunity to hear.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Greg Sorbara: Let me just say that for me, it's a real pleasure to be given the opportunity to speak for a few moments on this bill. In doing so, I really want to do three things: I want to talk a little bit about what this bill is really all about, I want to tell members of this House and people who are watching the proceedings how this bill came about, and finally, I want to answer some of the criticisms that have been launched, particularly from my friend from Beaches–East York.

1600

I had a lot to do with the creation of this bill. As you know, during the last campaign, our party made a commitment to take on some revisions to the Election Act and the Election Finances Act and the Boundaries Act as part of our overall platform for this Parliament. It was shortly after that election that this House struck a committee to begin that work. I had the honour of chairing that committee. It was an unusual committee, and I think it was a committee process that is to be commended because it worked very well. As you know, Speaker, mostly

in a majority Parliament the government side gets to have the largest number of votes on a committee. In practical terms, the government controls the committee. The government can outvote the opposition parties on committees, except in certain circumstances with certain committees under our rules of procedure. But this committee was different, and it was different for a purpose. It was different because it deals with rules that are, for want of a better expression, inside baseball. It's all about us and the rules and procedures that we use to renew this Parliament every four years. So it really relates to how we go about our business of campaigning and winning elections, and the rules that govern that. Because of that, I think the government wisely decided and this House wisely decided to strike a committee made up of a Chair—that was me—and one representative from each party. In this case, it was the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, the member from Welland—from whom apparently we are going to have to hear in a little bit—and the member from Willowdale, my colleague in the Liberal Party David Zimmer.

The government had no power to control the committee process. The fact is that any time the opposition parties wanted to outvote the government on this committee, they had the numbers; they could do it. It never happened once. There was a real consensus that the three political parties would get down to the business of looking at the Election Act and bringing forward recommendations that would ultimately result in a bill in this Legislature to improve the Election Act.

I made it perfectly clear, I think the government made it perfectly clear, and it was perfectly clear to the public and those who followed the process that we were not about to go about rewriting and reforming and transforming how we elect members to this Parliament. There were those who said, "We've got another chance to raise the question of proportional representation." There are others who said, "We have to figure out a way to make sure that other major electoral reforms were put into place." The fact is that it maybe disappointed a few—certainly not me. The mission was to do some modernization of the act—there were areas where the law was just dysfunctional—and some modernization, some housekeeping and some language that gave us a better system for the election that will take place in 2011.

I want to take a moment in my remarks to thank my colleagues on that committee: the member from Welland, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills and the member from Willowdale. I think we worked well together. We produced a report. That report was submitted to this House. The government then examined the report, and this bill is the product of that work.

What are we actually proposing in this legislation? What are some of the changes that will result if and when this bill is passed? Let's go through some of them. I'm going to repeat some of the ideas put forth by my friend from Beaches–East York. He mentioned getting rid of the politicization of the process. What does that mean? There were some really odd things in the old law, things that

required candidates, 10 days before voting, to submit their lists of who should go and work as poll clerks on election day.

Mr. Michael Prue: Bizarre.

Mr. Greg Sorbara: My friend says, "Bizarre," and he's absolutely right. That has been in there—in the old days, it was all about patronage and "I'm a candidate. I can get a job for my friends on election day. They'll get \$10 for going to work the polls and maybe a beer at the end of the day," even during Prohibition times. This thing remained in the act. It was really foolish, so we've taken that out.

More importantly, the act itself was very prescriptive, down to the number of people who needed to sit around each particular polling desk. It prescribed exactly what had to be done. It lacked flexibility, and in very many cases we've been able to address that issue and add flexibility and authority to the Chief Election Officer to do what makes sense on election day to make sure that the election is conducted properly and that people have easy access to the polls and are able to vote quickly and efficiently. There are a number of changes—I'm not going to go into all of them—to bring those changes about.

We also wanted to address specifically the issue of access to polling places by the disabled community. Now, my friend read into the record a number of comments, letters from my dear friend David Lepofsky. I've known David a very long time. I went to law school with David, one of the brightest people that walks this stretch of land that we call Ontario, a very bright man. From his days in law school until today, he has been one of the most articulate advocates for the disabled community that I've ever met, certainly, and that has ever served in any jurisdiction in Canada, perhaps North America.

The fact is that although our committee, made up of three parties, did not hold broad public hearings, our committee heard directly from David Lepofsky and the disabled community. Above and beyond that, I personally, as Chair of the committee, met on a number of occasions with David and with advocates from the community.

Am I surprised now that David is writing a letter saying, "Well, we didn't get a chance to comment on the bill"? No, I'm not surprised at all—not a bit. His job as an advocate is to say, "It's not enough." I understand that. He's doing what he needs to do and calling for broad public hearings. I understand that.

The good news is that, on this piece of legislation, there has been broad public consultation on the committee work and on the language of Bill 231. We have consulted broadly, and we have consulted fairly. We have consulted with political parties, and we have consulted with the disabled community.

Is this bill representative of everything that that community wanted? Certainly not. David made the point over and over to me, for example, that you've got to deal with the municipal voting as well: "You're dealing with the

Elections Act. You guys should take on the work of reforming the Municipal Elections Act." And if I said it once, I said to him 10 times, "David, we don't have the authority to do that." Our responsibility is simply the election laws that govern elections through this Parliament, so we were unable to do that.

But let's look at what we actually did. Firstly, in a new, more permissive bill, a bill that gives more authority to the Chief Election Officer, an officer of this Legislature, this legislation directs him, on an ongoing basis, to make sure that everything that can reasonably be done to provide for voting by the disabled community is done, and there will be a regular process of review by the Chief Election Officer.

My friend from Beaches–East York talked about special ballots. That's an amazing transformation from what was. In Canada, it's not anything that's really new, and let's be fair; we stole the notion of special ballots from the federal government and we expanded it and made it even more reasonable and rational for voters who cannot get to the polls.

1610

In the old days, under the old act, if you were not able to get to the polls, you could exercise a proxy. We've gotten rid of proxies. You know why? Because they don't work, they're unfair and they take away from the disabled person the right to actually mark the ballot.

Some people ask, how does a proxy work? Well, I'm the Liberal candidate. I go to somebody's apartment and I say, "You know what? You can't get out to vote. Here, sign this and I'll vote for you." That voter doesn't know whether the ballot was marked for the candidate that the voter wanted.

We're scrapping that; we're scrapping the proxy system. We're bringing in special ballots so every voter in Ontario who feels like he or she cannot get to the poll to vote can have a ballot sent to that voter's home. The voter can mark the ballot and get it to the returning officer so that the voter knows the ballot was marked in the way the voter wanted it to be marked. I think that's a great reform, and I am glad to say that we have incorporated the federal process here into our own system and indeed improved upon it.

One other thing that we did, in redesigning or making recommendations for the design, was to ask ourselves what other jurisdictions in Ontario do, and in particular what the federal government does. Nothing upsets voters more than getting to the polls and finding out that the rules are different for the federal and the provincial systems of voting; it doesn't make any sense to them. So wherever we could, we have made the Ontario Election Act in this bill reflect the standards that people know from voting in federal elections.

We have ended a number of silly provisions that no longer work. One of them is enumeration. I know my friends in the Conservative Party wanted to retain enumeration. In fact, in every election, my friends in the Conservative Party wanted everyone to be enumerated again. Remember those days when people would come

and knock on your door and say, "Who lives here? How many are 21? Do they want to get on the voters list?" Well, that maybe once worked, and it provided a lot of short-term work for people who were out of work, but the fact is that enumeration, in that model, meant that at six out of 10 homes there was no one home, and at two homes, people just didn't want to answer the door; it was too late at night. So maybe you would get two out of 10.

We have incorporated, in this bill, mechanisms to make sure that we have the most accurate voting lists possible. We have made provisions to make sure that those accurate voting lists are available as quickly as possible and that they are available to candidates so that candidates can go about encountering the voters and identifying voters and preparing themselves for elections.

I want to say a couple of things about the changes that we're making to the election financing act.

Way back when, this Parliament struck a committee that dramatically changed the way in which we finance election campaigns, and in my view, the rules have worked pretty well. We have a system of quasi-public financing. There are funds provided to every campaign and every political party, based on the number of voters in that area. We have a system that very carefully regulates the donation process. We have very strict limits on how much can be donated per candidate and per political party.

But there were a few anomalies, and in the context of modernization and housekeeping, we have made a few changes, or proposed a few changes, that I think will serve people well.

For example, it sounds foolish that we would even have to write it into a bill, but if you're an individual, you are able to give to a political party by way of a credit card. Makes sense: Most of us pay for most of what we buy these days with credit or debit cards. But if you ran a small business and you wanted to make a contribution to Mike Colle's riding or David Zimmer's riding or Glen Murray's riding, you couldn't use a credit card, so we've changed that.

One other thing that I think might garner a little bit of press is that we've made a provision to allow people to make a gift to a political party in their wills. You couldn't do that before. It's not as if it's going to change the world. I mean, yes, in writing my will, I would probably do that.

Mr. David Zimmer: Here, here.

Mr. Greg Sorbara: And I know David is going to do that. I've got a lot of blood, sweat and tears in this business of electoral politics; I believe in it strongly.

Mr. Peter Kormos: What about your organs?

Mr. Greg Sorbara: My friend from Welland says, "What about your organs?" That, too, but not in my will. Our friend George Smitherman made specific provisions to allow us to do that in another form. I'll tell you, no political party would want my organs at the time that I leave this marvellous planet.

Mr. Peter Kormos: They can be rebuilt.

Mr. Greg Sorbara: My friend says they can be rebuilt. Well, in some cases that might be true, but in my case I wouldn't have thought so.

We're in the midst of second reading of a simple piece of legislation that is designed to modernize the Election Act and the Election Finances Act and do some house-keeping. It's inside baseball. It's about us. This is not going to change the plight of Ontarians who are out there looking to get a job because their factory has just closed down. There are a lot of problems out there, and mostly that's what we deal with in this Parliament. Those are the important things. But there is an election coming up in October 2011. I don't know about the other parties, but I know our party is starting to prepare ourselves to make sure we are prepared for that campaign: that up until that campaign we have been dealing with the issues that confront this province, and that when that campaign comes, we will have a set of proposals for the next Parliament that will ignite the imaginations of the people of this province. But you know something? In the interim, we have a little bit of work to do with those mechanisms that we use to get us there, and I think this bill does that.

In closing, I would like to thank a few people: once again, my colleagues in this House who sat on the Select Committee on Elections. I'd also like to thank our new Chief Electoral Officer, Greg Essensa. He's an officer of this House. This upcoming general election will be his first. He has overseen three or four by-elections—

Interjection: Four or five.

Mr. Greg Sorbara: Yes, most of which have been very favourable to our side. That's an aside; it's not the major theme of this speech. Greg Essensa, I think, is just a real champion of fair and efficiently run elections, and we are very glad to have him.

Finally, although my name stands as Chair of the select committee, in all of the work that I've done, I've been assisted by my executive assistant, Sharon Laredo, who really does all the work in my office. I just have an opportunity to take credit every now and again.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill. I hope the House passes this rather quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Just in response to the member from Vaughan, we're gravely disappointed on this side of the House, at least the PC Party, by what's not in this particular piece of legislation, and that's dealing with third party advertising. I can understand why the Liberals didn't deal with it: the Working Families Coalition, which has run in the last two elections, 2003 and 2007, third party advertising in favour of the Liberal Party only. As labour leader Buzz Hargrove said, the objective of the Working Families group was to "make sure the Tories don't get elected here."

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People at home will remember that in the 2003 campaign their TV ad said, "Not this time, Ernie," referring to Premier Ernie Eves, and in the 2007 campaign it was,

"You decide." They raised \$1.482 million, and they spent, on those primarily TV ads, \$1.084 million, almost \$1.085 million. Most of that money is recycled public money because it comes from unions who get contracts from the government. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers contributed \$9,720; Ontario Pipe Trades Council, \$400,000; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, \$280,000—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: They're a good group.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm sure they're excellent groups, but the fact of the matter is, these people get government money.

Other people that contributed: the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, \$100,000; International Union of Elevator Constructors, Local 90, \$7,000; the operating engineers, \$150,000—all unions that benefit from public money that shouldn't be allowed, through the back door, through third party advertising, to do what isn't allowed during the election campaign by political parties themselves. It's a way for the Liberal Party to benefit from \$1 million worth of advertising that should be accounted for through this type of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: As I indicated earlier, I'm going to be speaking to this, I suspect at some point this afternoon. Folks will know that I was away in the latter part of 2009; I could mention that briefly, I suppose, when I have my modest 20 minutes. But it was fortunate that I got fixed up by the doctors and nurses and so on in time to get back here for February 15, when the House resumed after the Christmas break. I was grateful to have my Christmas break to do this recovery. I was grateful for the generous welcome that people gave me when they returned to the Legislature, and I want to extend that welcome today to Greg Sorbara on the occasion of his return to the Legislature. I hope that his recovery is as complete and gratifying and personally fulfilling as mine was. He deserves no less.

I'm going to talk to you, when I get a chance to talk, about serving on the Sorbara committee, because it was indeed a delight and an incredibly novel experience. It was unique, and I regret that there were but three of us amongst 107 who were able to join Mr. Sorbara, who of course was the standard-bearer for the Premier, and not inappropriately. He's one of the brightest people that the government has in its benches, and the government needs him now more than they ever have before. I suspect that they will be wooing him, and the seduction will acquire almost unsavoury qualities in the course of trying to bring Mr. Sorbara back into the matrimonial bed, if you will.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I want to congratulate, first, the chair of the committee, the member from Vaughan, and also all the members of this committee for their work and recommendations.

Even though we need to have better participation, I have to tell you that we are way ahead of many countries,

because I had the privilege to observe elections, as appointed by the United Nations, in Cambodia, in Congo, like the member on the other side of the House from Trinity-Spadina.

But over here, today, when we see some of the recommendations that were made by the committee—first of all, there won't be any more proxy vote. I've seen those proxies every election; they're flying around, and as soon as they can put their hand on that, they run to the polling station.

Also, one of the very important parts is in the nursing homes. In nursing homes today, we will have mobile voting services. When I say "mobile," in the past they were working in the nursing home all day to get, sometimes, four to six votes, and immediately you knew who those people had voted for. This is not right. Today, with this new regulation that they're going to have in place—and by the way, the member for Beaches-East York mentioned that we should have had a consultation on it after the second reading. I'm sure that we will have public hearings on that, either here or on the road.

Once again, thank you to the whole committee that has come up with some recommendations.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to comment on the speech from the member from Vaughan on Bill 231. I would say that our party supports some aspects of the legislation, including the depoliticization of polling workers.

I do have a couple of questions for the member, and that has, first of all, to do with special ballots: how they're going to ensure, from the mail-in part of the special ballots, that there's no fraud involved. In many of my municipalities, they've had problems with spoiled ballots when they allowed mail-in ballots, so I'd ask how he's going to deal with that.

Also, I'd ask why the committee didn't put forward recommendation 26, as recommended by the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, to do with third party spending in Ontario. Specifically, I note that the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills wrote in the dissenting report that the PC caucus endorses recommendation 26 of the committee to limit third party spending in Ontario and wants to make certain that this recommendation is implemented. He goes on to point out that other Canadian jurisdictions have enacted limits on third party spending. They range from a low of \$300 in Quebec to a high of \$183,000 federally. We have a situation, as the member from Simcoe-Grey outlined, where organizations like Working Families are spending millions of dollars in third party advertising outside of the election rules, and this is something that should be dealt with in this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Vaughan has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Greg Sorbara: I'll begin by going back to the comments of my friend from Simcoe-Grey. I think he was quoting Buzz Hargrove, who said that the purpose at

hand with third party advertisers was to make sure that the Tories didn't get elected in that election over two years ago. I'm not sure that's right. I think that the Tories did a good enough job all by themselves making sure that they didn't get elected. I don't think they needed help from anyone else.

I do appreciate, though, what my friend from Prescott-Russell had to say about some of the changes. He talked about elections elsewhere in the world. As we put this legislation ultimately into law, we ought to appreciate here in this jurisdiction that all of us, partisanship aside, are very dedicated to the notion of fair elections, where the democratic will of the people is ultimately the objective of conducting the elections. I think we move a few steps down that road with the changes that we have made here.

My friend from Parry Sound raises again the issue of third party expenditures during elections. I paid very close attention during the committee discussions as to what the member from Mississippi Mills had to say about it.

I want to end by saying that under the Election Act, the expenditures of all parties in elections must be reported and disclosed. That was the law. That has been the law up until now, and that will continue to be the law in this jurisdiction.

I hope this bill gets passed quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to speak this afternoon on Bill 231. Just for the record, I did listen to the member from Vaughan. I'm only sorry that I wasn't given two minutes to respond to it, because he brought up a couple of very good points.

One of them was that Greg Essensa, the new elections officer for the province of Ontario, is an arm's-length officer of the Legislature. I feel that he should feel somewhat vulnerable since they fired the Ombudsman, as well as the Environmental Commissioner, Gord Miller. So I hope that this next election goes well or they'll fire him.

1630

Now, the bill we're dealing with—they are independent commissioners at the will of the government. But here's the deal: This bill has 20 different sections, and our critic, the member from Halton, Mr. Chudleigh, spoke to this bill on the 16th, and I think did a commendable job in outlining our party's position on a bill that, for the most part, we agree with.

Listening to the comments today and from the previous speaker, Mr. Lalonde from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, it sounds like you're going to have public hearings. The member from Vaughan said that there was an all-party committee that struck a report, and that report is somewhat included in Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act.

The points that we have trouble with—I think the member from Simcoe-Grey, in his response to Mr. Sorbara today, stated clearly one of our chief concerns

with the legislation as it is currently drafted. Now, we have great hope that they will listen to us and the public in public hearings and change their tack on this third party financing.

This is the deal here: In the last provincial election, all joking aside, there was an inordinate amount of third party advertising that was really unfair. Those resources weren't available to the NDP and they weren't available to the opposition party as well. We know that the war chest—the Liberal Party just had a huge fundraiser last week, at \$920 a plate, and they raised well over \$1 million—close to \$2 million. So they really do have the lobbyists and the consultants on the string. We see that with the Samsung deal. We see that with the new deal this morning in the media with the solar panels with Bosch. And we see it in many respects in the eHealth scandal and the OLG scandal. We see this ability to attract lobbyists, and those lobbyists are willing to buy tables at fundraisers, which is just an unbalanced approach to the fairness of democracy. I wouldn't want to compare them to US Vice-President Dick Cheney, but they're awfully close to the edge of an unacceptable role in democracy for lobbyists. This is what they're failing to do.

We call on them now to amend the act by removing the third party contributions. In the portion on electoral finance, it's quite acceptable to put an amendment forward—the member from Simcoe-Grey tried to, in all fairness, point that out—to improve the bill, because those same rules would apply to us, if and when we become government in 2011. So it's not something where we're trying to unweight the balance here. We're trying to find a way of moving forward in fairness.

The member from Simcoe-Grey's been here quite a while, I think since 1990, and he's been on both sides of the House. He's been a minister and an Acting Speaker of the Legislature, so he's a very fair-minded person. He took the time to get the election finance information, and we found out under this freedom of information that they got \$1.4 million—this group. This group was made up of—and we're not making it up to smear or malign anyone.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The truth will set you free.

The Working Families Coalition is the group. You'll see their advertisements on television. It's basically paid advertising over and above the threshold that's allowed by any of the parties under election finances. This is another way of getting more airtime, unbalancing the public debate and discourse. And when you look into the details, it's not surprising that many of these people are finding themselves building the Windsor casino, the Windsor Energy Centre or other projects.

I don't want to impute motive. I just think that sometimes—we look here and we see the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 1739—\$9,700; the Ontario Pipe Trades Council—\$400,000; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 353—\$280,000; the International Union of Elevator Cons-

tractors—\$33,000; the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, Local 721—\$50,000; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 586—\$50,000; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 1687—\$12,000. These are members' dues being used for questionable purposes, I'd say. For any members listening today, if you'd like to call, we will give you a complete list.

What we're asking for is for Mr. Sorbara and Mr. McGuinty to eliminate this unreasonable and unacceptable politicization of the democratic process in Bill 231. Many countries throughout the world are fighting this corruption, if you will, in elections. I would say to you that most provinces are taking the lead ahead of Ontario. This is being debated as we speak in Alberta, BC, Quebec and many other provinces. And regions of the United States are trying to get rid of this. Barack Obama is doing it, so it's got to be right. I mean, he's perfect.

I'm going to go on. The CAW—\$200,000. The auto sector is falling off the cliff, and they're giving \$200,000 to these campaign ads. You've seen them. One of them was quite good because they picked almost personal battles. They demean the leaders of the opposition parties. They characterize them as untrustworthy. I think the suspicious tone of these ads is reprehensible. It's contrary to the Canadian way of kindness and gentleness and inclusivity.

Laughter.

Mr. John O'Toole: Now they're laughing, see? This is where the smugness comes over, which I frequently hear in this House—that somehow, they're the only ones with integrity and compassion. It simply is not the case. I would not discredit any member; I would say that all members come with the right motives. This is one way you could make it better and fairer and more honest here.

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation—\$100,000; the Canadian Ironworkers Political Action group—\$60,000. The list goes on.

In the limited time I have left, I want to mention a few more. Pollara strategic opinions: They're a polling company. Here they are, in for \$65,800. They're the ones the government contracts to do the polling data.

I'm speaking directly to the people of Ontario: What you're seeing here is the evidence. This is simply not right. It's not right for the Liberals, it's not right for the Conservatives, it's not right for the NDP. It's simply wrong. Get in line with the process. There are election rules: that they can contribute directly to the party, and the parties have spending limits. That's the issue here: In many cases, it's simply unfair.

When you look at the whole issue of the last provincial election—there was a referendum, and that referendum was to examine voting practices. There was a proportional representation ballot on there; mixed member proportional, I believe, was the actual question.

This is what we're striving for: fairness at the ballot box and fairness for all the parties, whether it's the Green Party or whatever party.

I look at Fair Vote Canada. Here's a good thing: It says, "Why don't politicians listen?" This is the bridge that I'm making to this bill. We're saying to eliminate this third party advertising. The cynicism you get is that you have Fair Vote Canada, in fact, running campaigns to break through the barrier of intolerance or being frustrated by the system that we have.

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We've got fixed-term elections now. There's more clarity about who can contribute and how much they can contribute to the political parties. But we've got to get rid of this fringe group.

The people in those unions are very credible people. Their leadership have determined that they don't want too many NDP in there and they don't want too many Conservatives, so all the money was spent purely on supporting Premier McGuinty. Now Premier McGuinty owes them. There's an IOU. There's an expectation—a direct link with some of these OLG scandals, the WSIB scandal, the eHealth scandal, the million dollars a day in consultants. There's a link here, and I'm saying we can fix it with this bill.

If they want to contribute to the parties, there's a contribution limit per company and per individual to the party and to the individual candidate. What could be more fair, more clear and more simple? On this side of the House, under our leader, Tim Hudak, we certainly want that amendment made.

For the most part, we're very much in support of some of the provisions under the bill. The special ballot procedure: We're in support of that.

Our member Mr. Chudleigh, when he was speaking on the 16th—it's worth looking up his comments because, as our critic, he took the time to review the 20 sections of this bill and listened to Mr. Sterling, who was our member on the select committee: a very seasoned person, I think, with 30 years here, who I believe has the right attitude towards democracy. He wouldn't be here that long if he wasn't trying to make it a better place for all of us and for all the people of Ontario.

I'm looking at one of the sections here. It's very important, this section. The member from Beaches—East York, I think, spoke quite passionately—I think it's important—about inclusivity, of extending the franchise of the ballot to everyone in whatever means that we can do it while those people can maintain their grace and presence, which is the special ballot.

Under section 114, the Chief Electoral Officer is authorized to study methods of improving the voting process and facilitating voting by persons with disabilities. The studies may be conducted by commissioned research and reports, establishing advisory committees and holding conferences. I think that empowers and mandates them, looking across Ontario at the different needs for the different regions of Ontario, whether it's in cities or rural, in small towns or large towns, and accommodating people with special needs, whether it's a sight problem or whatever other problems. I think that each of us, as members, would like that corrected and expanded to the extent necessary.

I think there's an extremely important flexibility, and even Mr. Sorbara, the member from Vaughan, in his remarks, made reference to that in his remarks, that he did want to get this right.

I think it's clear that the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell said that there would be hearings. I don't think we're going to change too much here today on the floor, but I can tell you there were three things. One of them Mr. Sorbara alluded to as well. There's an effort here, for those functional people within the ridings, to have federal and provincial rules in harmony. I think that makes practical sense, administrative sense, and is efficient as well.

What is missing, though, is that there was a change—and this is pretty important. The general public might not find this that important, but when constituents call my office in Durham, which I would encourage you to do, regardless of what riding you're in—if you happen to be more comfortable with any member, phone them. They'll usually advise the member who represents you, or at least get in touch with them electronically; we're all connected anyway.

This is the procedure here, where there was supposed to be what they call electoral boundaries. The boundary commission is not in here and probably should have been. What has happened here is, now they're starting to cherry-pick. This is important. Some of the members here are familiar with this as well. The member from Halton certainly is one of the examples. Some ridings in Ontario have about 60,000—some members. They tend to be in the north and they tend to be quite large, geographically. This presents a challenge of accessibility to the MPPs and their constituents. But there are provisions in our budgets for allowing them to travel more frequently, to get to these remote places. Mr. Brown as well, from Algoma-Manitoulin, is one example. He has served in cabinet and as Speaker, and he knows that it is harder for them. They have half as many constituents, often remotely, but they have specialized needs within those areas. Maybe it's a one-industry town; we heard about the lumber industry in such trouble.

Here's my point: We have other ridings, and Halton would be one, with 213,000 members. Are the constituents getting the same weighted vote in this Legislature? That's the issue on the boundaries commission. Those people with 200,000 have one vote, and the people with 60,000 get one vote, so their vote is worth almost twice as much, maybe four times as much.

Then you're looking at regionalization. The whole idea is that when my constituents call my office in the riding of Durham, they sometimes don't know if the policy is a federal issue under immigration, or it could be a birth certificate or passport. Often they just know the person, which is the way it should be, really. Politics is when there's an election; after that it's about customer service. When they call, we don't care if it's a federal issue, a provincial issue, a municipal issue, a school board issue or if it's not even the right riding.

We don't give them the bureaucratic shuffle like, "You've got the wrong number," or "You didn't know

your riding." We try to help them because, actually, each of us is paid by you, the voters of Ontario, so we all work for you. If you're not, you should be out of office in the next election, in October 2011. Deal with that.

But here's the point: If you had a boundaries commission, federal and provincial members, as they are by legislation that we passed, would have coterminous boundaries, federally and provincially. My federal member is the Honourable Bev Oda. She's the international development minister federally, a wonderful person. I work very closely with her, and I would say that if people call our office, we make sure that our federal member knows the issue. If they call our office, and it's a municipal issue—they often call us on Mr. Arthurs', the member from Scarborough-Pickering—

Interjection: A good member.

Mr. John O'Toole: A very good member. He was the mayor of Pickering. Lots of people would call him because they know and trust him. When they call his office, I'm sure his staff say, "Look, the nuclear plants, you should call John O'Toole's office. He's the member for Durham." But, in fact, he has nuclear plants in his riding. My point is that, in reality, members do try to work together.

This bill is successful in some of it and it fails in other parts. The failure part, as I have mentioned, is this: The boundaries commission as well as third party advertising are two unacceptable breaches of what is a very solid piece of legislation.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has made it very clear to us that we want to move forward and support it in second reading. We want it to go to committee, and we feel confident that we can find all-party agreement to correct the parts of the bill that just don't work to make Ontario the best place and the fairest place, and to be the leader in this country in terms of doing the right thing.

I can only say that I won't try to bring up these third party contributions every time, but if it happens during the next election, I think those organizations' members should come to their leadership group and say, "Look, we simply can't do this. It's unacceptable behaviour." These ads demeaning and characterizing people falsely are simply unacceptable in Ontario today.

I ask the public here to contact your member or my office, and we will make your views known to get this bill to move forward and to do the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Once again, I listened oh, so carefully. This is not a trivial matter. I suspect I'm wont to say what I do, that this is a relatively modest proposal. In terms of the content of the bill, it is a modest proposal, but the whole proposition of electoral reform is far from modest. It is crucial.

I suppose one of the things that I find regrettable, and I'm going to speak to this, is that the committee felt itself somewhat restricted by the time frame that was imposed on it and by the scope—the limited, the very restricted, the very narrow scope—that was allowed at the end of

the day, notwithstanding the terms that were voted upon by this assembly.

1650

Does the bill tinker with things and make life easier from section to section for some voters and do some things that secularize some of those appointed positions—local electoral officers and so on? It does. The real issue, as people have been pointing out, is what it doesn't do. That's not, in the total scheme of things, in and of itself a reason to oppose the bill necessarily; sometimes it is. I'm eager and New Democrats are pleased and eager to see this bill go to committee because I suspect the public has some things to say. There are going to be some issues around accessibility. I know Mr. Prue has spent a good chunk of time on the accessibility issue. He, of course, is the New Democrats' critic for disability issues. And I've got some things I want to say around that too—some things around broader accountability. The bottom line, something that should concern all of us, is voter turnout—getting people to vote. Lord love a duck, we've got lower and lower and lower voter turnouts. That should be of concern, and I'm going to have a chance to speak to that in a few minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. David Zimmer: Back in September 2007, in a letter to the Accessibility for Ontarians and Disabilities Act Alliance, Premier McGuinty made the following commitment: to “develop an action plan to make elections fully accessible to voters” with disabilities. When the select committee was meeting and in the process of doing its work, it took that direction to heart, and I can tell you that one of the things we spent a lot of time talking about was how to improve the voting process for those Ontarians with a disability. That was very, very important to all members of the committee. Ontarians with a disability are often, in many, many cases, our most acute followers of what's going on in this Legislature. It struck the committee as odd that that particular group, which has some of the greatest interest in what goes on in this Legislature, was in many cases faced with the greatest challenge to actually get out and vote.

What this legislation does is that it authorizes—and I'm very proud of this on behalf of the committee—the concept of special ballots that will be managed and supervised by the Chief Electoral Officer. The Chief Electoral Officer can assess a disability need and create a special ballot that is tailored to that particular disability. It goes so far as to give the electoral officer the authority to do a home visit to assist at the home with the voting process.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to comment briefly on the facts that were put into the record by my esteemed colleague from Durham, who always brings a balanced perspective and has the years of experience to do it in pretty well anything that he's debating.

The reason I raise that at the outset is, with his experience, I have to balance that with my own, which is much more limited. The very first thing that he said was very much related to the very first thing that I experienced a day or two after being nominated as the candidate in Thornhill back in 2007, and that was the politicization—is that the right word?—of the voting process in Thornhill, which we had to challenge. The first press release I ever sent out said, “You've got to remove the chief returning officer because of a relationship to an opposing candidate,” and indeed that was done at the senior levels of the province. So it pointed up a need, and I'm very happy to see that my colleague has raised that need and that the bill indeed reflects that need. That's one thing that I wanted to say.

The other thing that I wanted to do was echo my colleague from Durham's concerns—and indeed all of our party is concerned; our caucus is concerned—with the fact that we really haven't, in this piece of legislation—which is a good piece of legislation—completed the task, and that task is to address the issue of third party contributions.

I know that the member from Vaughan reminded us all that parties and individual candidates have an extreme responsibility to Elections Ontario to do the reporting that they have to, to justify the use of funds that are collected for their individual campaigns. That's fine, and I think we all are responsible or we wouldn't be sitting here. But it's necessary to do it at a party level and it's necessary to do it on a third party level so that we can ensure a level playing field.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I always have great respect for the member from Durham. He's a man of great experience. I think he started his political career—I know the history. He was born and raised in Peterborough. I think he started his career as a school board trustee and went on to become a local councillor and then moved to the region of Durham, and in 1995, he was elected to the Ontario Legislature. So he has certainly experienced several elections at various levels.

We do know that this bill incorporates a number of changes. It certainly cleans up the issue of proxy votes, and I think there is certainly no one in this House who would not suggest that this is a very good thing to do. It also looks at best practices that have been incorporated in other provinces across Canada.

It also allows post-secondary students to choose where they want to vote. Having been a university student and been away from the riding of Peterborough, I think we should give that opportunity to make sure that students, where they choose to vote, have the ability to vote.

It does provide some new provisions for people with disabilities, which is extremely important. I know when I was a municipal politician, we had to go to great lengths over a number of years to make sure that public buildings that were deemed and identified as polling locations in municipal elections were accessible for people with

disabilities. That was often a difficult challenge, because many of our public buildings were older in design and nature and had to be extensively modified to make accommodations for people with disabilities to make sure that they exercised their franchise—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. The member from Durham has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Welland spoke briefly on the voter turnout issue, and I look forward to his remarks next, because I do have a lot of respect for his participation here and on that special committee. I'm sure his input will be valued and informed.

The member from Willowdale also spoke on the special ballot process, which I think all of us are in agreement with.

I think the member from Thornhill was most accurate when he said it was a balanced debate, and as a good friend of mine, he brings great deal of informed opinion to the table. He spoke, most importantly, about enumeration. Now we're going to have a permanent electoral list, which I think is an advancement that all of us would probably agree with.

The member from Peterborough, much like myself, has a mixed background, having served quite some time on the municipality of Peterborough council, along with one of my uncles or relatives certainly, Jack Doris, who has served as mayor. In fact, he's going to run again. I think he's served publicly as long as Hazel McCallion.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Forty-plus years.

Mr. John O'Toole: Forty-plus years. Anyway, congratulations, Jack Doris.

The municipal election has been moved to October, which I think was a good move by the government as well—not in this bill but in another bill—and I want to wish the municipal candidates coming into the election this year—which isn't to be confused with this election. Mr. Sorbara said this bill does not affect the Municipal Elections Act, but it is important. The province does have authority over that.

Jim Abernethy is the current mayor of Clarington, Bob Shepherd is the current mayor of Uxbridge, and Marilyn Pearce is the current mayor of Scugog. Those are the three municipalities that I work directly with at the lower tier, and of course, at the upper tier we have the discussion about the election of a regional chair in Durham, which is a controversial issue that I won't go into.

But all of the councillors and municipal people are our partners, along with you, the constituents, the viewers today, and we're there to serve. This act changes it, and we are calling on one change, and that's to eliminate this third party advertising.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

1700

Mr. Peter Kormos: First, please indulge me for just a moment, because we came back February 15, we're going to prorogue but just for the weekend, so that's fine.

We'll be out of here on Thursday and then come back on Monday, which is the regular sitting schedule. As indicated earlier, some folks know that I had some back problems and had some surgery that fixed it up. This is the first chance I've had to speak during orders of the day since we got back. I sincerely want to express gratitude to all the people here who wished me well when I was not here and when I was suffering the incredible pain of some serious back problems. I'm really grateful; people were very kind to me, very generous to me, people who may not ever believe how much I missed them and being here—and I really, really did. I missed my detractors; I missed my most severe critics.

It was very serious. I'm glad to be back, in any event, and as I say, I'm incredibly grateful to folks for their generosity of spirit, and I'm grateful to my caucus colleagues who, of course, had to carry the extra load. I'm also left very conscious of how relevant one can or can't be by noting that they did quite well without me. That's something all of us should reflect upon, that at the end of the day, your folks will do quite well without you. So a sincere thank you to the people here. It's not just the members; it's the staff and everybody. I was watching things that were going on. I was making phone calls. I'm on my second flat-screen TV. I don't want to tell you what happened to the first one, but Sony has done well by me.

Howard Hampton was the member of this Sorbara committee, as I'm going to call it, and I remember—he's a delight. David Zimmer was the member for the Liberal caucus, and I've always enjoyed working with David. David is a very intelligent, very capable person, just a joy to work with, always challenging, and he was not an inappropriate person to have on this committee. I want to be very careful. Norm Sterling was the Conservative member, and of course Norm is the longest-serving member, along with Jim Bradley. Not poor Bob Runciman. Poor Bob Runciman—give me a break. He's not poor at all. Bob Runciman, who is a dear friend whom I love dearly, he and his wife—and I'm so pleased for him. Bob won't be advocating for the restoration of MPP pensions anymore, will he? Bob effectively got his. But I miss Bob. I missed him from the get-go. I'm sorry he's not here. I'm very, very fond of him, and he is an irreplaceable person. But how that came about, of course, was that I was mentioning that Norm Sterling, who, along with Jim Bradley, is the longest-serving member of the House—they were on this committee, and Greg Sorbara was chairing the committee.

Again, I have a lot of respect for Greg Sorbara. I indicated that earlier. I have a lot of respect for him, I like him and I admire his intellect, but Greg had never, I don't think, chaired a committee before, and he thought, through no fault of his own, that as the chair he was going to sort of be like Fidel to the Cuban politburo. He was going to summon Raúl and Che and Camilo Cienfuegos and seat them around him and explain to them what was going to happen next in the revolution.

Well, to Greg's surprise, he learned that majority rules in a committee. Mr. Sorbara made reference earlier to the fact that this was a unique committee because it was a tripartite committee with one member from each caucus, and the opposition parties effectively formed the majority. He darned near swallowed his bubble gum, to be fair, when he discovered that because he just had no idea that was how it was going to work.

Mr. Sorbara comes from the corporate world; right? He's very successful. He and his family are very successful entrepreneurs, and like so many corporate people who get elected—now, Mr. Sorbara's so very politically savvy too, one of the best around, no two ways about it in terms of the backroom of politics; right? He knows how the machinery works. I'm confident that if the truth were to be known, if one could be entirely candid, he would acknowledge that this was a revelation.

But it wasn't long before the opposition members learned that the committee, with its rather majestic terms of reference—and you'll recall them. I'm not going to read them, because I hope people have got the copy of the committee report with them. Mr. Zimmer does. Others who have the copy here in this debate, the copy that was tabled in June 2009? I guess nobody bothered reading it. Everybody got a copy.

That's the problem with these types of reports. It was a report to the Honourable Steve Peters, "Your Select Committee on Elections has the honour to present its report and commends it to the House," signed by Greg Sorbara MPP, Chair, June 2009. Of course, the opening of it is the terms of reference of the committee. I recall the motion because the motion was pretty broad. You recall it, too, don't you, Speaker? The motion that the Premier's office wrote to strike this committee was very broad, and New Democrats quite frankly were rather enthusiastic. Mr. Prue was. He thought, "Hey, here's an opportunity to really grab the bull by at least one horn and do some meaningful things."

My caucus colleagues met with me and the leader. There was a lengthy discussion about the sort of issues that we in the New Democratic Party thought could and should be raised and considered by a committee that had such broad scope, that had such a wide or robust mandate.

New Democrats came to this committee eager to see a number of things addressed. We made it very clear that we saw the committee—and I call it the Sorbara committee. We felt very strongly that it could deal with election financing. Mr. Zimmer remembers that. When we talked about that, when we raised that in this committee, Mr. Zimmer's eyes lit up—and again, he's a person of great intellect. He was eager, I suspect. People around here tend to be very careful about what they say, especially on the record, so you have to read body language, I suppose. You have to use your intuitive intelligence; right? There's a book written about that just recently—wasn't there, Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: There is.

Mr. Peter Kormos: —about how valuable intuitive intelligence is. Now, if Mr. Zimmer considers me to be

totally out of line in saying this, I suspect he'll rise on a two-minute response and say that the member for Welland has got it wrong, that he, Mr. Zimmer, wasn't enthusiastic. I don't think he's going to do that, because he was enthusiastic. He was ready to spend the time, invest the emotional and intellectual energy to address some of these issues—and not to say that we were going to write law but to prepare a report back to the Legislature.

The NDP had high hopes for this committee. We had hoped that maybe the committee would consider the Manitoba, Quebec, federal election financing approach, so that once and for all, once and for all, forever and ever and ever, public and private, more importantly, interest group financing shouldn't determine election results.

1710

Why do corporate donors give money to political parties? They're not buying them—I'm not going to suggest that for a minute—but they sure as hell are renting them. It may not be a long-term lease, but corporate donors to political parties expect to see some return on their investment.

When they buy \$10,000-a-plate tickets to dinners with the Premier and his gang of however many happen to be conscripted to that evening's soiree, they want the ear of the Premier. And they don't just want his ear; they want results. You've got corporate donors putting cash on the dash, and they want to see the goods delivered.

That's the nature of the beast, isn't it, Speaker? You've been around. For a person as young as you, you've sure had a lot of experience. You know what the story is, and it's not pretty.

That's what corporate donors are all about. From time to time, so-called public interest groups—most of them have modest means, but there are a couple kicking around that have pretty significant means, don't they, Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: A lot of money.

Mr. Peter Kormos: They are "public" in corporate title only, because from time to time, when you peel back the veneer, you find that they represent some mighty interesting interests. Do you remember Silvio DeGasperis? Asked why he attended a \$10,000-a-plate Liberal fundraiser, he said bluntly, and I quote Hansard, "I wanted to speak to Dalton about my development issue in Pickering. I knew the reason I was there." Hell, at \$10,000 a plate DeGasperis expects to be on a first-name basis, and he expects to see the goods delivered. This level of corporate financing, interest-group financing of political parties—Mr. Prue, just the other day, the member for Beaches, during question period raised the fact that the airport authority, with public monies—monies paid to it; they get a transfer of payments from the federal government. Am I right, Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Which is taxpayers' money. Then the surcharge on tickets: A surcharge is charged by airports, and then, of course, the airlines themselves charge you—as a customer, as a flyer, as a passenger on that plane—for the landing rights, the tax on the plane land-

ing at that airport. This is all consumers' money. You've got the airport authority funnelling—shades of Patti Starr—public and taxpayers' money into the coffers of the Liberal Party of Ontario and into the coffers of the campaigns of Liberal candidates in some very, very recent by-elections.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Not everybody's.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ms. Albanese complains, "Not everybody's."

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm not complaining.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ms. Albanese, talk to your colleagues and ask how it's done. There are a couple of them who, I'm sure, could give you the phone numbers of the contacts—there's that line, "I have many contacts amongst the lumberjacks." There are a couple of colleagues you've got here who could tell you how it's done.

You're a wonderful member of—look, I like you, Ms. Albanese. You've not been corrupted yet, but clearly your resentment, Ms. Albanese, of not being a beneficiary of this largesse demonstrates some sort of passion to be corrupted. I don't want to be a party to that, but I suspect she's got Liberal colleagues here who would more than eagerly assist her.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: No resentment whatsoever.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Now Ms. Albanese says she doesn't want the money. She doesn't want to be a part of that crowd. I don't blame her. She has morals, and she's not about to surrender them by selling herself to corporate interests that are prepared to funnel taxpayer and public funds—with no consent or permission by those taxpayers or the members of the public—through to political parties, one presumes, so as to achieve political ends.

New Democrats thought that it was important for this committee to consider banning corporate and union donations. New Democrats thought it was very important that this committee consider that.

New Democrats wanted to talk about other ways for the electoral process to be more accessible to persons with disabilities.

New Democrats were concerned about the abandonment of enumeration. There isn't one of us—never mind us, we who get elected. The teams who elect us, volunteers who go door to door, sometimes in the miserable cold of late winter or early spring by-elections—the most uncomfortable season of the year to be out campaigning—know that the fact that voters' lists are not up to date and complete is an incredibly frustrating thing and makes it very hard to do what people should be doing in the democratic process.

My time—are you sure that clock is accurate, Speaker? Speaker, you could intervene now and exercise your jurisdiction to provide justice for individual members by rolling that clock back, because I'm sure it has not been accurate.

One of the real concerns that I think everybody on the committee had, but the government clearly didn't—what we learned, and Mr. Zimmer will recall this, is that at the

end of the day this wasn't about what the committee was going to recommend. We learned not to spin our wheels, not to let the engine idle or to burn gasoline unnecessarily—or propane; whatever your choice of fuel might be—because this was all about what the Premier's office was going to do at the end of the day anyway. What we've got here is what the Premier's office was prepared to do—very disappointing.

Read the New Democrats' dissenting opinion in the report, but also hearken to this: You tell me how, in 2010, in an election in the most prosperous part of Canada—Toronto Centre—after all of this consideration about accessibility during the voting process, could we have possibly had a voting site that was inaccessible? After all this time, after all of the focus, after the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and as I say, amongst the wealthiest and most densely populated parts of the world, you still have people confronted with, as I recall it, and based on the Toronto Sun article, a set of stairs that made it impossible for people in wheelchairs, amongst other things, to get up and down to vote.

How can that be? What is going on? Who's in charge? You don't need a Sorbara committee to address that. You need somebody who is prepared to be accountable and accept some responsibility.

I haven't yet heard an apology from whoever is responsible or accountable. Surely, with this government's obsession with apologizing—and, Lord knows, they haven't done enough—you'd think that at the very least there would have been a public apology by the people who are responsible for selecting those sites, and perhaps an explanation of exactly how stupid they were, that they would confront persons with disabilities with a stairway in downtown Toronto—not some rural, remote community where the opportunities are limited.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to have just a couple of minutes. I want to take the opportunity, since the member from Welland indicated that this would be his first opportunity to get a full rotation in since his return. Certainly it's my honour to be able to spend a couple of minutes commenting on his speech and to welcome him back in that fashion.

I have to tell you, Speaker, I haven't always enjoyed all of his speeches. In my time here, there's been one or two times that I've questioned whether or not I've really got the full value from his hour. Maybe the good news today is that it was 20 minutes, so he can get back up to full speed.

I must say, though, I did appreciate yesterday's article in the Toronto Star written by Jim Coyle. I thought it was not only gracious and generous, but there were astute observations of the role the member from Welland has played in this place and the contributions he has made for so very, very long. I think that it's well deserved, and I was very pleased to read that article.

As to his comments in respect to the legislation itself, I'm pleased to see that there are members here, certainly from the government side—both Mr. Zimmer and Mr. Sorbara—who participated on that committee, which was an important initiative undertaken by the government. I think there are some very good initiatives within the legislation, not the least of which is the special ballot provision. I know from my municipal days that garnering proxy votes, when people couldn't be there—it was always nice that people entrusted you with their vote. I recall during one of my early mayoralty campaigns that a young lady came with her father to my office, and it was her first opportunity to vote—she had just turned 18 six or so months before that. But she was going to be out of town at that point in time, and she entrusted me with her vote. That was important. But I think this is a better provision: special ballots, so she could cast that vote herself and not depend on me or anyone else to fulfill her wishes.

So I think there are some very important provisions, with reference made to issues of disability, the use of technology—a lot of good provisions in the bill that are available. I'm anxious to see the debate continue and hopefully see the legislation adopted.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm also pleased to welcome the member from Welland back to the Legislature and see that he's returning to his usual fine form. We had a member from our party on the committee as well, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills. He, too, wrote a dissenting report, specifically to do with recommendation 26 of the committee. So I would like to ask the member from Welland: What happened to recommendation 26? Because it's dealing with third party advertising. In that dissenting report, he writes, "Third party advertisers have a legitimate role to play in the democratic process but they need to be open and transparent and should not have a freer hand to influence the political process than the individuals and parties who take part in the election."

I agree with that, and we've seen the Working Families Coalition spend millions of dollars in the last two elections. Like the member from Welland, when he was talking about corporate donors, I think the Working Families Coalition is wanting a return on their investment, or, as he described it, "They want the goods delivered." Frankly, I think we've seen that happen with bills like Bill 144 and Bill 119. So I would like to ask the member from Welland, what happened to this recommendation 26 of the committee to limit third party spending in Ontario? For further detail on it, you can read the complete dissenting report by the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

There are other aspects of the bill that we do support: certainly modernizing and getting rid of some archaic rules, like having a list of workers supplied by the political parties 10 days before voting, which, I think, is a depoliticization of the workers involved with elections. I

think that's a positive thing, but I would be interested in seeing what happened to recommendation 26.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is indeed an honour to comment on my friend from Welland. I came back in order to make sure that I heard the full 20 minutes of his speech, because he always speaks with such an educated, yet folksy, down-home charm. He tells great stories, he holds the audience captive, and he brings them all within the ambit of what he's trying to say.

Mr. Greg Sorbara: Yes, but what about Kormos's speech?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm talking about Kormos. I'm not talking about you. I'm talking about the member from Welland.

Within that time, he brought up some really key issues. He brought up the issue—which I'm still hoping to have resolved by the Minister of Transportation—the whole thorny issue of the GTAA and how they took \$12,875 of people's money who had to pay, and have no option but to pay, the fees when they travel through Canada's busiest airport. They took that money and they funnelled it to the Liberal Party. I don't know whether it's illegal, but I sure think that it's morally reprehensible what was done. The member from Welland had every right to question exactly how that money came about, how it was spent and whether or not political parties of any stripe should be taking it, because we discovered, after the question, that in fact other parties were taking the money as well.

He also raised a very real question, which I spent some time on today, about disabilities, and asked a very solid and good question: What was happening in the riding of Toronto Centre in 2010, in a province as rich as Ontario, in a city as cosmopolitan and savvy as the city of Toronto, where a person would show up in a wheelchair and couldn't vote and had to be carried down the stairs? I think these are legitimate questions and asked in his own—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. David Zimmer: The member from Welland is back, and I welcome him back. We enjoy listening to him, but we always have to be vigilant about the mischief that he's trying to stir up.

In his 20-minute remarks, he made comments somehow implying that I, as the Liberal member of the committee, was keen to launch into the whole area of electoral financing reform. He challenged me, if that was not the case, to say that he was wrong. So I stand here and I look at the honourable member from Welland and say categorically: You're dead wrong, and I invite you to review the transcripts and so on.

I would add this additional thought: The member for Welland implied that but for Liberal intransigence on that select committee on election reform, that somehow we would have delved into the whole area of electoral reform. But I can tell you, from comments at the com-

mittee and in public, that the one place the member for Welland did not want to go, in terms of electoral financing reform, was anywhere near a discussion of union donations. So you see, you're stirring up the pot here, trying to create discord in the Liberal ranks.

I say, in closing, that I spoke my mind at that committee, and I spoke forcefully. I was not in any way intimidated by our illustrious chair, who guided us through complex and detailed discussions and reached a fair series of recommendations. So I say to the member opposite, the chair of the committee—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. The member from Welland has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I feel compelled to join Mr. Zimmer in his praise and adoration of the great helmsman, Mr. Sorbara. In fact, I'm surprised that this report wasn't printed in a little red book. I suspect that, should I visit Mr. Zimmer's office in the near future, there will be portraits of the helmsman, Chairman Sorbara, on his wall, perhaps with candles lit around it and wreaths and garlands of flowers.

I also want to apologize to Mr. Zimmer: I misread him. But I'm heartbroken to learn that he's not keen at all about considering or discussing election finance reform. I saw him and understood him to be an enlightened, progressive person who was interested in a fairer and more just electoral process. I've known him for years now. I've always known him to be an open-minded person who never shied from a discussion, never mind a debate. So I'm saddened to learn that he's just not the man I thought he was, that he's not the advocate for far-reaching and wide-ranging consideration of topics that may not have ended up in the report, but at least warranted some consideration.

But I know him well enough and my affection for him is strong enough to know that, given some time, we can bring Mr. Zimmer around—and I'm confident that the fair-minded people around him in his family and his social life will help us put the appropriate pressure on him.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's always a joy to speak after the member from Welland. It's just good because the expectations are much lower when I'm standing to speak. But I do want to join the members in welcoming him back to Queen's Park and to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. You, sir, were truly missed, and it's good to get you back here. As I mentioned to him once before, when he's speaking, I learn far more about this place, the history and the tradition, so it's good to have him back to educate the rest of us on how to get things done right.

This is a very important bill, Bill 231, speaking on dealing with both the Elections Act and the Election Finances Act, pieces of legislation that ensure that our democracy, our electoral system continue to move further forward and progress in a manner that is truly fitting of a

democratic society. This really ensures that our institutions remain strong so that those of us, like ourselves, who are privileged enough to be elected and to be standing here are elected in a manner that is legitimate and reflective of people's decisions and desires.

I think a lot of you know a little bit about my background. I have spoken about that before, as to how my family and I came to Canada. That's why I feel very strongly about this particular bill and all our democratic institutions. I think I have mentioned before that my father was involved in the pro-democracy movement in Pakistan, in my native country where I was born. I lived there in the 1980s when there was a military dictatorship and there was no right to vote. There was just simply no right to vote because a military junta was the one in power, and a general made the decision. When he did at one point decide that there would be elections, they were not party-based elections because political parties were banned. In fact, I remember a time when any gathering of five or more people was not allowed under the martial law.

In those kinds of circumstances, you cannot have any type of healthy debate. You cannot have an assembly of people where you can share political ideas, because a repressive regime feels that that's not right, because that undermines that regime's authority.

It was in that climate that I started to learn about politics, about rights, about democracies and what's important to make sure that everybody in a country is respected. My parents were very involved in that process. As I have mentioned before in this House, my father was part of a movement to restore democracy. He led a pro-democracy march. It was illegal to do so, so he was arrested. He was tried by a military court, a general. He was sentenced to up to 10 months as a political prisoner, and he spent about nine months—and the story goes on.

I vividly remember visiting my father every weekend, along with my mother and my other siblings, and that was a very transformative part of my life: Why did he do this? It's interesting; you can imagine being 10 years old and attending school at that time—and 10-year-olds can be very cruel to each other—and getting taunted and teased by your peers, because for them, your father was a criminal because he was in the jail. I was standing there trying to make those arguments about, "No, my father is a political prisoner because he believes in democracy." None of that mattered, right? Ten-year-olds don't understand. This 10-year-old did because he was living through it, but the other 10-year-olds did not.

It's quite a learning experience, being able to visit your father and seeing him in shackles, literally, both hands and feet, and being treated as a criminal when his crime—his only crime—was that he wanted his fellow countrymen and countrywomen to have the right to vote in a fair and open election. That was it; that was his crime.

I still have a copy of his charge sheet. I should bring it translated one day from Urdu to English and read it in this House. It makes you laugh when you read it because

it talks about offences which are fundamental to democracy: "inciting people to vote," I think it read; "inciting people to have democracy," the right to speak out. Those were the charges that were laid against him.

Thank God, in their wisdom they made the great decision of moving to a country like Canada because they did not want their children to grow up in a society where they did not have a voice. They did not have the most simple, most fundamental right to vote.

Now, fast forward: It was 1988 when we moved to Canada. I remember distinctly, I became a Canadian citizen in 1992, and my very first vote was on the Charlottetown accord, the referendum.

Mr. Peter Kormos: How did you vote on it?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I voted for it. I was really against the Meech Lake accord, I don't know why—I had just come to Canada. I was just learning Canadian politics. But with Charlottetown, I was really engaged.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Bob Rae screwed me around on that too.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm sure I'll hear about that in your two-minuter, Mr. Kormos.

To this day, I remember feeling the goosebumps, walking into that voting booth and being able to cast a ballot. I thought about my father and my mother and the sacrifices they made to make sure that I was in a position, as a free citizen, to be able to cast a ballot on the future of my newly adopted country. Merely in the country for four years, and here I was an equal citizen having the right to cast a ballot, to decide on the future of my country, to change the Constitution of my country. This is where people lose blood on the streets in some parts of the world, and we were able to do it in our Canadian society in an extremely civilized manner.

I don't think I have missed any single election, municipal, provincial or federal, since that day, where I have not cast my ballot, because I will not let my parents down. I would not let my father's sacrifices down by not exercising my right to vote.

It amazes me when I go door to door during campaigns—and I've campaigned for a lot of people in the past, and I've campaigned for myself, and there are by-elections going on right now—the number of people who tell you at the door, "Oh, I don't vote." It really breaks my heart every single time. I feel like giving them a speech like I'm giving right now, telling them why it is so important that they should vote. In our democratic country, where we have all the benefits and privileges of living in a very civilized society, it's sad to see that people sometimes exercise not to vote. I always say, "Listen, you might just want to go and spoil your ballot, but at least make that effort, because there are a lot of people around the world who would give their life for the opportunity to mark that X on a ballot."

Imagine the time when I got to vote for myself. That was exciting. Can you imagine, 19 years later, walking into a booth—

Mr. Michael Prue: It's supposed to be a secret ballot.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm letting you know I voted for me. That's no secret. There's only one vote in Toronto I have, and that's me, and I got my vote.

I remember very quickly putting an X by my name: Naqvi, Yasir. It was after that I just paused and thought, can you imagine, I just voted for myself. I'm sure a lot of you have voted for yourselves many, many times. If it happens every single time, it becomes routine. But for me, it really gave me pause to see the ballot. I was hoping there might be a way that I could keep that ballot for posterity's sake, but I'm sure that would be breaking some provision in the Election Act, which I'm supposed to be talking about.

Anyway, I just wanted to give the context of where I'm coming from when talking about the system we've got.

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We have a great system in this province. We have an incredible system which allows people to exercise their right to choose representatives every four years. We are extremely lucky to have that system where all 107 of us sitting around this assembly are legitimately elected as the voices of our communities.

Of course, we're at a heightened level of enlightenment where we want to make the system even better. That is the effort we are trying to make, as I read Bill 231: to make sure that we have a system which allows people to properly exercise their rights so that they are able to cast their ballots. So it's important that we have issues around accessibility, that Ontarians with disabilities are not denied their rights. It's extremely important, because we are at that level of democracy where we want to make sure that nobody has any impediment to casting a ballot in an election, because if there's an impediment then their voice is being muzzled, and we cannot afford that in our democracy. That's one of things this legislation is trying to do: It's trying to give the Chief Electoral Officer the authority to have accessible voting equipment.

The special ballot procedure which is allowed for eliminates proxy voting and ensures that if you're not around in your community, you still have an opportunity to cast a ballot. If you happen to be out of the country or if you're on military duty, we do not deny you your right to vote. Just because you do not happen to be in your community, you still get that opportunity to vote. Through the amendments introduced in this bill, we're making sure that special ballot procedures are put in place so that those who are not in Ontario at the time of an election have an opportunity to exercise that very, very important right.

I note the provisions around post-secondary students. I think Mr. Prue, the member from Beaches–East York, talked about his experience, which I think a lot of us can relate to because most of us probably went to university or college away from our homes, and there was always that battle: "Where do I vote? Do I vote at my university or do I vote at home?" I'm sure we lose a lot of young people because of that. I'm sure we lose a lot of young

people who probably don't go out and vote because they don't know whether they are on the elections list at their post-secondary institution or if they are in their hometown. I have the honour of representing Carleton University, which is located in Ottawa Centre. There are a lot of students—I'm trying to remember the number, how many live in the residences. It's a large number. I've knocked on their doors during the campaign. That question always comes up: "I don't know. I think I vote in Toronto, where my mom and dad live," or, "I vote in Sault Ste. Marie, where I was living before." This bill, through a provision, speaks to that. It allows for students to choose whether they want to vote in the electoral district where they reside temporarily or where they live permanently, giving students an opportunity to make that decision. It's a very, very important point to make sure that our students have the opportunity to vote.

This is an important point because we also know the level of apathy that exists in our elections right now. That is becoming a serious issue, as I alluded to earlier. A high proportion of people who don't vote happen to be young people. You are often reminded that there are two kinds of people who vote—and you can go a polling station and see this. Our senior citizens vote, and why do they vote? This is my speculation: They vote because they remember what it was like. They fought for many of the freedoms we enjoy so much, so they don't take their vote for granted. Thanks to all the seniors who go out and make sure that they cast their ballot. That's why you've always got to listen to seniors and their point of view. It's extremely important because—you know what?—they have voted and they will vote again.

The other people I've also noticed who vote a lot proportionately are new Canadians. They go out and vote, and I think they go out and vote for the reasons I was talking about earlier: In many instances, they have lived in countries where they did not have the right to vote. For them, this is a blessing. This is why they came to live in Ontario or Canada. It's incredible to see them go and vote.

Unfortunately, somehow our young people are not as inclined to vote. We need to make sure that we make our system as accessible and easy as possible for them so that they can exercise the right to vote, so that they don't run away—and I will use the words "run away"—from that right, that obligation they have, come election time.

I'm confident that a provision like this is a good step, when we allow our students who are either at university or college, away from home, to choose whether they want to vote where their post-secondary institution is located—for example, in my case, Carleton University in Ottawa Centre—or in their home riding, where they lived before, whether it be with mom and dad or by themselves. This is an important issue.

I'm mindful of the time, but I wanted to talk about a couple of other things which are very important in this legislation, and speak more to the modernization of the whole Election Act and Election Finances Act.

One of the issues is around election finances: receipting when donations are made. In this day and age,

with the Internet and the capacity to give money securely on the Internet, one of the things we're getting very used to is—I often do this. If there's a breast cancer run or the Terry Fox run and a friend of yours is participating in it, they send you an e-mail saying, "Give me a pledge." You just go online and put your credit card number in and voilà, you just made a donation, but what I also find very convenient is that my tax receipt is immediately e-mailed to me. I have that, right there, and I can print it out and use it. I don't have to wait until it arrives in the mail, and it comes closer to election time.

I believe that this legislation, as I read it, will allow for that provision to take place, that if political parties choose to have e-receipting when people make donations, either to a riding association or a campaign or political party, they will be able to get those receipts right away, electronically. That is a step in the 21st-century direction. I think we should not shy away from that. It is the right thing to do. We need to continue to adapt to technologies. Of course, we need to make sure that the integrity of the system is always maintained, but we need to make sure that those mechanisms are fully utilized so that we are making it easier for people to exercise their democratic rights, even when they are making donations to political parties.

Lastly, another point which has been made quite a few times is about de-politicizing poll workers and returning officers. I think this is a step in the right direction. I don't think that MPPs or candidates need to give names of individuals to be poll clerks and returning officers. It's better that the chief returning officer for the riding is the one who gets those people and appoints them. I think it makes the system far cleaner and makes sure that voting procedures are followed accurately.

Anyway, I look at the clock. Almost 20 minutes are gone. This is what happens when you speak after Mr. Kormos.

Interjection.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: No, I'm not done yet. Wait for my big wrap-up.

I think this is an important piece of legislation. I think, as I said earlier, we need to look at this in a broader context. I think we need to appreciate the democracy we live in. We need to appreciate the kinds of opportunities we have as Ontarians in terms of the way we conduct our elections every four years. We are extremely lucky to have that opportunity.

In my context, in my life story, this is a very important part of who I am, because that's how I landed in this great country and this incredible province. I feel very honoured and privileged that, through the same system, the same mechanism, people had faith in me and were able to give me the opportunity to be their voice here in this great Parliament of ours. So the system works, the system is great, and we are far, far better for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

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Mr. Toby Barrett: The member for Ottawa Centre has put things in perspective with respect to his opening remarks and his childhood memories in the country of Pakistan during the 1980s, I think he indicated.

I spent some time there briefly in the late 1960s, and I can't remember the political situation then. I wasn't too concerned with things like that at the time. But it is a little chilling to realize, as the member from Ottawa Centre explained, that one was not permitted to vote or to participate in democratic processes in a free and open and transparent manner. He went on to describe the hand of the state coming down on his father for doing such things as inciting people to vote and for doing such things as inciting people to speak out.

That certainly puts things in perspective and makes us realize something that I so often overlook, something that is exemplified in the closing phrase of the Speaker's prayer, or what was referred to as the Speaker's prayer up until quite recently, where we live in a society, if I can recall the quote, "where freedom prevails and justice rules." For many, many years we would commence our working day with that expression in our mind. There's no argument that justice and the rule of law really underpin our democratic process, something that was not seen in Pakistan during the member's childhood.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I, for one, enjoyed the comments and contribution to the debate by the member for Ottawa Centre: very well put, and I am pleased that I was here in the Legislature listening carefully.

He raises an issue around encouraging people to vote, ensuring that people vote. In conversations with members of other caucuses around the committee work that Mr. Sorbara led, the prospect of, I believe, Australian models of making it compulsory for people to vote was discussed. One of the observations I made is that it should be—because the whole trend is, "Let's make it easier for people to vote. Let's let people vote from the luxury of their armchair while they're sitting there in their underwear with a remote control in one hand and a beer in the other."

I say: To the contrary, it shouldn't be too easy to vote, because then a vote could simply be cast carelessly. I don't think there's anything at all wrong with people having to take the initiative to get out there and go to a polling area and cast their ballot. I think the comments from the member for Ottawa Centre reflecting on places in the world where people struggle for the right to vote should compel us to take that tack rather than simply open the doors and let people vote willy-nilly by a click of their computer button.

Let's get around to what is going to happen next. I'm sure all three caucuses—I know the New Democrats—are going to vote for this bill on second reading. The bill is inoffensive in and of itself. It's a modest proposal, as I indicated earlier. It's far from a major overhaul or reformation, never mind transformation, of our electoral

system, and it's far from all that could be implemented. But I'm looking forward to committee. I hope this government is committed to the committee process, and a healthy committee process, so that members of the public can comment on this bill, just as members of this Legislature have.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: It was a very compelling debate by the member from Ottawa Centre. It just makes us stop and reflect on how critically important and vital it is to our democracy in allowing people to participate in our elections. He certainly made that very clear, especially in light of his own family and his father.

I was remembering, in terms of our own piece of legislation—and the member from Welland makes a good point. I hope there are some amendments to this bill.

I know I've been pushing for one amendment, but I get deaf ears on it all the time. The stupid thing is that when we do the audit of our election statement, we have to get a CA to do it, and the CAs don't want to do it.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: Why can't we get the CGAs to do the audit? They're willing to, and they've got the time. That's one simple amendment I've asked for, and I don't know why it's not in there.

The other thing is, I remember in the by-election in St. Paul's, there was a lady in a wheelchair who I have known for years in the Doug Saunders building. She had to go in her wheelchair to the next building to vote. There should have been a polling station in that building. There are about 400 people in the building. The worst thing of all was when she went to the building to vote, they wouldn't let her vote. They said, "Where's your stupid card?" She said, "Well, listen, I got that card, but I get so much junk mail, I lost the card." But she had her ID with her picture around her neck. They said, "No, you can't vote." This lady has been voting for 50 years. They wouldn't let a disabled person vote who had a card around her neck because she didn't have that stupid card that gets mailed and that everybody loses.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's not that stupid.

Mr. Mike Colle: Anyways, they lose the card because they get so many cards that come in junk mail.

I think we've got to make a few amendments in this bill and make an even better bill if we can.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I listened with interest to the presentation of my friend from Ottawa Centre, which I probably can summarize—and I don't mean this in any tongue-in-cheek way—as an ode to democracy. He spent a considerable amount of time talking about how lucky we are here in the province of Ontario and how lucky we are in Canada to have the kind of freedom that allows us the elections that we enjoy, and a bill like this does nothing but enhance him.

On that I agree with him, but his comments are also not unlike the bill for this reason: The bill is a good bill

that contains an awful lot of improvement in how we go to the polls, but is conspicuous by the absence from within it of things that we need. You were conspicuous, I should say to my friend, in the speech that you made by not alluding to those aspects.

I'm talking particularly of, while you're talking about other jurisdictions, the other jurisdictions in Canada that have addressed the issue of third party financing quite well, while we have left this alone. In comments that I've heard this afternoon, both the ones that you missed and the ones that had been made by other members, the comment is consistent: We'll go to committee with this bill, we'll talk about ways to improve this bill and we'll talk about things that we can use to enhance this bill. I would hope that that would be one of them.

I think, on the positive side, that it's good to know that one of the things that has been addressed—and you talked about being part of a university environment—is the fact that we can get the vote to people where they are, as opposed to making them come to vote somewhere else. That applies very much to our university community, a community with which I find myself very involved. I think that anything that we can do to increase voter turnout would be a positive, and this bill does begin to address that very well.

We'll be supportive of it, but we'll equally try to bring amendments at committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Ottawa Centre has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank my colleagues the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, the member from Welland, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the member from Thornhill for their very constructive views on the comments I was making.

I'll probably start in reverse order with the member from Thornhill. I agree: Part of this process, again, is that we go through three readings and we go to the committee process so that we try to improve the bill, and we debate that. I hope that some of the suggestions you're making—and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence was talking about a very specific suggestion—that there's an opportunity to consider all that, absolutely.

This is, again, part and parcel of the system we have in place in this Legislature. It is historic in nature. It comes from convention. It has been practised for hundreds and hundreds of years, and it has worked.

I wanted to come to the comment made by the member from Welland. I'm not sure where I am on the point about whether or not we should make it easy for Ontarians to vote. I think there has to be a balance somewhere; there probably has to be a line somewhere. I agree that it should not be as easy as sitting at home, having a remote control—

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Mr. Peter Kormos: In your underwear.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: In your underpants—see, I said it for the first time, and probably, hopefully for the last time, in Hansard—and be able to vote. But who knows?

We don't know where the technology will lie 10, 15 or 20 years from now, where that may be considered a norm. We have to adapt with time. We need to make sure that the opportunities exist for people to vote, just like we're doing in terms of accessibility issues. There was a time that that was not considered a priority. You'd show up and if you had to climb 10 flights to vote and you were in a wheelchair, nobody cared. But times have changed. Now we accept and recognize it's our responsibility to make sure that our polling stations are fully accessible for those who are disabled.

There is a fine line, and we need to make sure that we are always evolving and adapting to ensure that our system of democracy remains strong and healthy and that it allows for Ontarians and Canadians, broadly speaking, the opportunity to vote in an effective manner.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 6 of the clock, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

FOREST INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Thornhill has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer given today by the Deputy Premier. The member for Thornhill has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the Deputy Premier may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I want to address this question in a very specific way that covers this question but other ones as well. The matter that I was questioning the Acting Premier on this morning is a very, very serious issue. We're not talking about some grant that we're asking for. We're not talking about a transfer of money. We're talking about saving 1,500 real jobs that pertain to the livelihood of 1,500 real families in the northern part of the province of Ontario, where the forestry industry, to say the least, is not doing very well and where we have an opportunity to do something together that will work on behalf of the region and on behalf of these families. So this is not about asking a question of the government and getting back the stock response that tells us on this side about some deficiency that might have existed, in their perception, 10 years ago. It's talking about a deficiency that exists now on the part of the government of the day.

Grant Forest Products, the subject of this question, is a historic made-in-Ontario company worth somewhere between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion, and it contributes almost \$110 million in wages alone—more than that, but just in wages—to northern Ontario communities, and it holds made-in-Ontario technology and know-how developed here, particularly in the fibreboard business. The bankruptcy court may allow the sale of the assets of Grant Forest Products to Georgia-Pacific of Atlanta for 30 cents on the dollar, and it may do so—the indications

are that it will—some time this week. That will mean the imminent possible loss of as many as 1,500 direct and indirect jobs to which I refer. We're talking about communities like Englehart, Timmins and Earleton.

There are a couple of programs that address this, and my questions this morning pertained to them. The forest sector loan guarantee program—\$350 million initially—is a five-year program created by your government in June 2005 to support and leverage capital investments in new value-added manufacturing, increased fibre use efficiencies, energy conservation efficiency, and development of cogeneration. To date, only seven applications have been accepted, with total loan guarantees of less than \$43 million, which leaves \$307 million on the table unsubscribed. Couldn't that be used?

The forest sector prosperity fund: a \$150-million, three-year program created in September 2005, also by your government, and now closed, with \$92 million left unsubscribed.

The response that I got to my question from the Acting Premier was basically a complete and utter disaster of a response. In fact, it was embarrassing to watch. She made reference to everything except forestry and made no reference to Grant Forest Products at all. As a matter of fact, I believe that she, at that point in time, had no clue at all what this file was about. Then it went, for the two supplementaries, to the minister of northern affairs. He refused to interfere on the grounds that Grant Forest Products—

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Be careful what you say. I get the last five.

Mr. Peter Shurman: You'll get your chance—was going through bankruptcy court. Bankruptcy court was where we were trying to settle the issues of Chrysler and General Motors not too many months ago, and it didn't stop this government from getting involved in those bankruptcy proceedings to rescue businesses that were going basically south.

The minister of northern affairs never addressed the availability of the loan guarantee program at all, never addressed the availability of the funds in the programs that have already been committed by the McGuinty government, and never provided a satisfactory response to our proposal for a no-cash investment in a made-in-Ontario historic company, its workers, their families and the communities they live in. Our proposal would not involve the expenditure of any new money; our proposal would not involve the taxpayers of Ontario becoming shareholders of a private company at all.

The bottom line here is, what are you going to put money in? We talked about a Ford investment. I'm not going to get into the issue of that, but in that investment, in broad strokes, you're looking at a possible 750 jobs in five years. This one is not even an investment, and we're talking now about 1,500 jobs being rescued now. The idea of maintaining an interest in Ontario's north, of maintaining an economy that's vibrant up there, of not losing a 63rd mill, is what this question was about, and I don't feel that the question was in any way, shape or form adequately answered at all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Acting Premier, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: What I recognize is that the member opposite in fact really didn't repeat the question that he started with in the House this afternoon, so I relish the opportunity to respond now.

First of all, he started with asking, how have we implemented our throne speech? That's what he said. Allow me the opportunity to suggest that not only do we deliver on the throne speech, we deliver in droves. And that's what we are doing today, despite the fact that Ontario has seen the greatest recession of our time, certainly in our lifetimes and maybe that of our parents as well.

We've really suffered in Ontario, more than most places in Canada. That's meant that we have had to come to the table innumerable times for many sectors. But one issue that affected the forestry sector in particular started long before we became the government; it started in about the year 2000, and that was the dollar value.

We know there are changes in the forestry sector around the world, and they have a lot to do with the fact that in our climate, you can't grow a tree like you can in the south; they grow three times as fast as a Canadian tree. If you look at how Ontario stacks up in Canada, BC, Ontario and Quebec, with a massive forest industry, all have taken their share of hits because of changes around the world in the forestry industry.

How have we responded? That's really what you're asking. How does an Ontario government step up to the plate when they see changes around the world that affect them, when we know we have to push our companies forward to be competitive on the world stage? I say that every time we've had a significant initiative, we've never had the benefit of the opposition parties voting in favour of the very support that we want to give to our private sector partners. The Next Generation of Jobs Fund that landed new investment even in our most difficult year: They voted against it. Even the advanced manufacturing investment strategy, a loan program that helps companies in your own backyard: You voted against that initiative.

When we come forward with serious tax reform, the greatest reform to help the competitiveness of our companies of all time in at least the last 30 years, these opposition members want to be opposed. When what we need now is support for our private sector to create jobs and we come forward with initiatives to do just that, the opposition members are opposed.

Let me say, in particular for the forestry sector, where were they when it was time to make those votes on support to the forestry industry that flowed over \$600 million, an unprecedented amount? The member opposite decided to ask these questions tonight, after question period and after everyone's gone home, when I could stay all night to talk about our support and how you voted. You are opposed to every measure that we've extended, whether that was building new roads through the forests to help those companies, whether it was stumpage fees, you name it—unprecedented support by this government to that sector.

In particular, I think this member should be aware—and so should all the constituents in the north. I recognize he's only from the south, but the northern people out there who might be watching need to understand: \$205 million through the prosperity fund; \$141 million through the loan guarantee program—these are all new—\$94 million through the northern pulp and paper electricity transition program; \$87 million in stumpage relief; \$3 million in wood promotion; \$38 million in forestry inventory funding. For every single one of these initiatives, the opposition members were opposed when it came to the vote.

Are you really interested in the forestry sector? Are you really intent on helping people maintain jobs, or are you just doing this for show? Because when push comes to shove and it comes time for the Speaker to stand up and see where you stand on a vote, you have been opposed every time to every initiative helping the forestry sector. We're going to call a spade a spade here.

This is the only government that has given this level of significant support to forestry, and not just forestry, because other sectors have suffered too: many sectors, in particular advanced manufacturing, that frankly were the hardest hit with the advent of the rise of the dollar against the American dollar.

So how can we insert ourselves to be helpful, to help that competitiveness, to make up for 35% that they had naturally just because of the dollar value? We've done many things, and many of them are working. We expect this member to stand in the House in support of the forestry sector, just like the government of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1811.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
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Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

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Wednesday 3 March 2010

Mercredi 3 mars 2010



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Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 3 March 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 3 mars 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Islamic prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act / *Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale et la Loi sur le financement des élections.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Burlington this morning.

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak briefly this morning to Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act. This act came about from the work of an all-party committee. I think the chair was the member from Vaughan, and there was one representative of each party on the committee: The member from Willowdale, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, representing our party, and the member from Wel-land were on this committee. They made many recommendations to do with changing the way that elections are run.

With most of those recommendations, our party does support them. They're giving more power and discretion to the Chief Electoral Officer. There's the creation of a special ballot procedure, and voting by proxy will now be eliminated. There's really a depoliticization of the workers who work election day. It used to be that there were some archaic rules; I think that within 10 days of the actual voting day the parties had to submit lists of workers. That was in the day when I guess it was really a perk and a reward for people. Now the authority will be switching: The staffing of the polls will be the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer, and I think it will be done far in advance so you don't get this last-minute kind of thing going on. There are also many changes to make voting more accessible for the disabled population. So there are many things in the bill that we think are positive.

I certainly would have to say that in terms of the special ballot procedure and the way that comes about, the details are not in the actual bill itself. I know that many municipalities in my riding use a mail-in ballot. I think when the province handed that responsibility over to municipalities they weren't specific in terms of the way those procedures were to be carried out. As a result we've had varied systems amongst different municipalities across the province. In the early stages of mail-in ballots we've also had all kinds of problems, where sometimes up to 40% of the ballots are not considered or are void because of problems with the procedure. So obviously there needs to be careful consideration of the way that's done so that we don't see that happening across the province.

I think the thing I'm most concerned about with this bill is what's not in it. I don't have it right before me, but I note that the representative from our party, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, did file a dissenting report which focused on third party advertising, because this bill is all about election finances and the rules for election finance as well. They're pretty clear—and quite strict—for political parties.

What we've seen in the last couple of elections—the election of 2003 and the election of 2007—is that one party was spending millions of dollars through third party support outside of those rules, and that is the governing Liberal Party. Obviously, that and other forces have been successful, because they've been the government in the last two elections.

I think that with elections, you want to see a fair election; you want to see a level playing field. Right now that is not the case, because they have these groups in the Working Families Coalition. I note that the member from Simcoe-Grey listed who the members of the Working Families Coalition are. They're mainly unionized groups, like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, who contributed \$9,720; the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, who contributed \$400,000; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, who contributed \$280,000; the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, who contributed \$100,000; and the International Union of Elevator Constructors and the operating engineers, who contributed \$150,000.

Unions that benefit from public money are spending that money—millions of dollars in the last two elections—to help one party win power. I say that's not a good thing for the province of Ontario, and that should be considered within this bill.

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: That's a good point. My colleague raises the point that other jurisdictions do have rules to do with third party advertising, and ours are very weak. I don't think it's an oversight by the government, because there was a recommendation by the committee—I think it was recommendation 26—that this should be an issue that is dealt with, and yet they have not dealt with it. It's to the government's advantage right now, but if you have an interest in free and fair elections, this should be considered.

In the 2003 election, the Working Families Coalition ran campaigns like “Not this time, Ernie”—big billboards and TV ads; there were probably radio ads as well. They're kind of the dirty work, I'd say, so that the government doesn't wear the nasty stuff; they're shifting that over to their supporters, who are spending millions of dollars doing the dirty work.

The member from Welland was talking about corporate donors and people making donations who are looking for a return on their investment; they want to see the goods delivered. We have bills like full-day kindergarten. If you have the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation donating \$100,000 toward electing or re-electing the government, they are looking for their interests to be looked after when we have legislation before this Parliament.

We've seen bills like Bill 144, going back to a card-based system for unionization, which I think some of the supporters of the Working Families Coalition very much wanted; and Bill 119, the workers' compensation bill, which some of these supporters very much wanted. You have to ask yourself what the connection is between these pieces of legislation and the Working Families Coalition support of millions of dollars in election campaigns for the Liberal Party.

I say that's not a good thing. If we're going to have free, fair and balanced elections, this is an issue that should be dealt with. It was recommended by the committee in its recommendation number 26, and yet it's not in the legislation. It's something of real concern to our party that this issue has been completely ignored. I think we're reasonably in support of what the bill does address, but third party advertising is a huge omission.

With that, I'll pass it on to the member from Burlington to continue with her comments. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the chance to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I recognize the member for Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm pleased to speak to this bill, which will amend both the Election Act and the Election Finances Act. I guess this all began rolling out in June 2008, when a Select Committee on Elections began to meet. It was appointed, really, to study the effectiveness of our existing electoral legislation. The member from Vaughan chaired the group, and the member from Welland, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills from our caucus and the member from Willowdale participated.

0910

The committee's final report was delivered to this House in June 2009, and it really was a timely and very important piece of legislation. It was a real opportunity to modernize and improve our legislation concerning the preparation, administration and delivery of the Ontario Election Act. But in the pattern that this government has been evolving, this Liberal government that has gone astray, another lost opportunity has happened here; another lost opportunity to create transparency and accountability. This time, it's in the most democratic task that our citizens and residents are able to perform.

What concerns me and our caucus most about this bill isn't so much what's in it but what has been left out of it. This piece of legislation is totally silent on and does not address third party advertising. It's very vague on accessibility and totally fails to establish a permanent boundaries commission, making Ontario the only jurisdiction in Canada now that doesn't have a boundaries commission.

Let's go to third party advertising. This is something that kind of mushroomed in the night two or three elections ago and needed to be addressed. It's a serious issue in Ontario and it needed to be addressed, but there's nothing in this bill that speaks to third party advertising.

Third party advertising operates outside of the Election Act. There are no rules here; it's like the Wild West. It makes elections questionable, in my opinion. We all know what purpose third party advertising serves in elections and election results: It's to support a political point of view without identifying, really, who is doing it, why they're doing it or what their purpose is. They are anonymous. Is that democratic? Third party advertising distorts the Election Act and is very concerning to the democratic process.

The PC caucus is disappointed that the government has ignored third party advertising in this piece of legislation and endorses recommendation 26 of the Select Committee on Elections to limit third party advertising and spending in Ontario, but wants to make certain that this recommendation is implemented. It may have been the most important piece in the entire legislation.

Ontario has a law, but it is very weak in that it only requires registration and reporting of contributions for six months of the election year. As the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, Mr. Essensa, told the committee, “This allows third parties to build advertising war chests”—war chests—“but not to report on the source of those contributions at an earlier time.” What's that about? Is that democracy? Is that transparency? Is that accountability?

Third party advertising has been recognized as a very serious problem in Canada by our federal Parliament and by no less than five provinces. British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick, Manitoba and Alberta have addressed it, but not Ontario. Some Canadian jurisdictions have enacted limits on third party spending; they range from a low of \$300 in Quebec to a high of \$183,300 federally. In Ontario, there is no limit.

In the last provincial election the third party advertiser—we all know who that is; it was called Working Families. Who are Working Families? Who are they? They spent more than \$1 million on advertising just during the writ period. They raised \$1.4 million solely from trade unions. Because of the way Ontario's election laws are written, it is impossible—absolutely impossible—to know how much was raised and spent during the issuance of the election writ.

We have to abide by different rules within our parties; the same should follow for third party advertising. Despite the Working Families Coalition scandal, the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer, the legislative initiatives in other provinces and our PC dissenting report, this Liberal government has not addressed the problems with third party advertising. It leaves you to wonder whether it's because it supports the party.

Third party advertisers have a legitimate role to play in the democratic process in a democratic way: transparent and accountable. They should be open, just like the parties here in Ontario, and should not have a freer hand to influence the political process than the individuals and the parties who are actually taking part in the election.

It is also so important to ensure that such third parties are truly independent and they are not subject to undue influence from any registered candidate or a political party in the conduct of their advertising campaigns. It's simple. This is a no-brainer. Money should not continue to influence our democratic process.

The PC caucus recommends, in concert with recommendation 26, that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario enact a law that—and let me tell you, there are four points—restricts third party spending; restricts third party contributions; requires timely reporting of third party contributions whenever donations are made; and provides for better enforcement of existing law to ensure that third party spending is not used to circumvent election finance laws, including stronger anti-collusion provisions.

We also recommended that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario establish an all-party committee, with equal representation from all three parties, to propose draft legislation to address these issues. The bill is silent on this. We were ignored. The residents—the voters—of Ontario have been ignored, and it seems like this act will continue for the next election. Shame on you.

Improved accessibility has been vaguely addressed in this bill also. This bill does say that the CEO of a campaign would be permitted to use new technologies, and those would include voting machines and that sort. That is to enable persons with disabilities to cast their ballot privately and independently, and the returning office advanced polls would also be included. There would also be adoption of special ballots.

Nonetheless, we must have full committee hearings. We must hear from the disabled community. They need to tell us what their needs are for accessibility. We don't know the answers; we can only assume what those answers may be. So we need to hear from the disabled

community so that we can effectively improve the tools that we give them and improve their accessibility.

With regard to the boundary commission, this bill should have created a boundary commission to ensure fair, transparent, democratic boundaries are created and people are equally represented. That's what democracy is about.

As a result of the Representation Act, 2005, Ontario's electoral districts are no longer tied to changes in the federal electoral districts. A permanent boundary commission was debated during the committee but not included in this piece of legislation.

What are the Liberals afraid of? Despite recommendations to create a boundary commission, this piece of legislation does not identify a process for redistribution of ridings. With growth occurring in some communities and decline occurring in some communities this would be a very valuable tool. Ontario is the only province in Canada without a boundaries commission.

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This bill is silent on several things that I think would have increased the democracy, accountability, and certainly the transparency of how elections are held in our province. How can anybody argue with that? What is being hidden? So debating this bill, which is an incomplete piece of legislation, only accomplishes part of what it set out to do; the rest of it is a waste of time for this House to debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I think I was the only member listening to the member from Burlington and the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka.

I have to say, I agree with most of the comments made by the two members. I also agree that there needs to be stronger legislation dealing with third party advertising; I really do. When the member from Burlington says that money should not influence the political process, I agree with that. That is a direct connection to their desire to have better controls over third party advertising.

But I want to ask the same question to the member from Burlington: What you said about money not influencing the political process also applies to how unions and the corporate sector influence the political process in a way that some find, as you stated in third party advertising, is negative and that we need to check. But what is your opinion about ending corporate donations and union donations, as many other provinces have done? You made reference to other provinces having dealt with third party advertising. What do you think of that? Because in my mind it relates very much to the same argument that you were making, but your party hasn't taken a position in that regard. I was just interested to know whether or not you personally have an opinion on that or whether your party has a position on that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Is he talking to the member or you, Speaker?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You see how my eyes sort of go in both places.

Mr. John Yakabuski: At the same time, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: At the same time. Which is an ability that very few have. But I wonder—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Now the very member who brought up who he is talking to is also talking to him, so you see, it goes on.

Questions and comments?

Mr. David Zimmer: I just want to highlight and speak to one reform in this act, and that is the new flexibility, authority and responsibilities given to the Chief Electoral Officer.

In past elections—and indeed before this legislation, if it's passed—the Chief Electoral Officer had a very prescribed authority as to how he could operate elections. This legislation gives the Chief Electoral Officer greater flexibility to take into account the needs of local ridings and voting boundaries. For instance, in the city of Toronto the requirements in terms of polling stations, hours that the polls are open and how the whole process works reflect a different set of demands than those of, say, northwestern Ontario, rural Ontario or other parts of Ontario. This, over the years, has been a source of discomfort if not downright annoyance to voters, particularly as we're applying the same set of rules in a set of rural boundaries, where people perhaps drove an hour or half an hour or long distances to get to the polls, as we are to downtown Toronto, where the issue is going to the local apartment building and getting all the people in the building down to vote.

When you read through this legislation, it does give the Chief Electoral Officer considerable authority to reflect local needs in his decisions about how the voting process is carried out. This, of course, is subject to consultation with all the political parties.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments of my colleagues from Parry Sound–Muskoka and Burlington.

The crux of this bill—I'm going to touch a little bit on the member for Trinity–Spadina; he wants to compare corporate and union donations to third party advertising. Well, donations are tabulated. If they go to a political party, the political party is responsible for spending that money within the limitations of the Election Finances Act, and they have to ensure that they fall within the spending limitations.

The problem with third party advertising, and that is what this bill has neglected to do, is that it's free game—wide open. To have a third party as strong as the so-called Working Families Coalition in Ontario influencing an election without a clear indication of the party they are supporting, or that they're opposing other parties, and not responsible for claiming that money as election expenses is categorically wrong. It tilts the playing field; it upsets the balance. That is why we were so disappointed in this government, which knows it is the primary beneficiary of that third party advertising.

If you look at the legislative record of this government, the Liberal government here in Ontario post-2003 election, when all that third party advertising—I remember seeing the signs go up all over the place in my riding the week before the election: “Not this time, Ernie,” with an insulting caricature of then-Premier Ernie Eves. You knew that that kind of advertising and those kinds of games in politics are wrong. This government could have done the right thing with this legislation. There are a lot of good pieces and a lot of good changes in this bill respecting elections in Ontario. But they could have done the right thing and eliminated third party advertising like so many other jurisdictions have done. It would have been the right thing to do, the fair thing to do—a level playing field for all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. James J. Bradley: This is a change in position in the Conservative Party. I can remember in years gone by, when the National Citizens Coalition was spending all kinds of money and the taxpayers federation was spending all kinds of money, particularly to support the Mike Harris government, that I didn't hear a peep from members on that side. But it has changed now, because someone else is involved in third party advertising.

If they were in opposition to it in principle, one could say there's virtue in the argument being made. But it appears that it's only because the shoe is on the other foot that the members of the Conservative Party are now obsessed with third party advertising.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: So, Jim, is it okay now?

Hon. James J. Bradley: They don't think it's okay now.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But do you think it's okay?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm just looking for a matter of principle. Who knows what will appear in future legislation? There are so many virtuous parts of this legislation—you will recall that it was the result of an all-party committee. This is the kind of legislation I actually like very much, where all three parties who are represented in this Legislature get together and have some recommendations. Now, is everybody happy at the end? No, not necessarily. But I can say to you that this bill, on balance, will be well received.

I remember that our Prime Minister was part of the National Citizens Coalition at one time, and they were spending all kinds of money putting forward a very right-wing agenda, which was legitimate on their part to do. But I didn't hear any objections from the Conservative Party at that time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Burlington has up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'd like to thank the members for Trinity–Spadina, Willowdale and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the Minister of Municipal Affairs for commenting.

You know, this isn't a matter of what's good for the goose is good for the gander; this is a matter of what's

good for democracy here in Ontario. If, at that time, anybody felt that whatever was going on in previous governments was not correct, to take up on that and use it now because they have the power to do so is wrong. It's wrong. When you know what the right thing to do is, you do it. You don't do it to give yourself more opportunity to move your own agenda forward. You do things because it's right for the people of Ontario.

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This government has lost focus that they work for the people of Ontario. The people of Ontario want transparency. They want accountability. They want this government to be honest about everything they do. Third party advertising is through-the-back-door kind of government. It isn't good government. It isn't good electioneering. It isn't good campaigning.

So although this bill addresses some things that needed to be fixed, it sits silent on some very, very important principles: Elections should be open; they should be democratic; they should be transparent. We've fallen short with that in this legislation. So if the opposition feels that this is the time to change it, and the government felt 10 years ago that it was wrong to do, then this was their opportunity to do it, with the huge majority that they have. They've missed that opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 231. I just want to say, again, that I agree entirely with the comments made by the member from Burlington. I know my friend John from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke always gets sensitive when I ask some tough questions of them, but I did say that I agreed with much of what you said, and I still do. I think her comments that the bill does some good things but leaves some major things out apply. It is the case the member from Burlington makes that New Democrats make.

As it relates to the issue of third party advertising, the Minister of Municipal Affairs makes some good points, but then fails in his conclusion to actually understand what we are talking about. Because he's quite right: The Conservative Party had a third party, the National Citizens Coalition, that was doing the very same thing federally by way of third party advertising, and lending its support, weight, money and influence to lean people to the Conservative Party nationally at the time. So the Minister of Municipal Affairs makes a very strong case that we should deal more effectively with third party financing, but don't. In the end, while he makes a good argument, he fails to make the connection that the National Citizens Coalition was not very good for us and that there is another third party that obviously supported the Liberal Party in the last election and that perhaps—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Not the Ontario Federation of Labour, surely.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We're going to get there in a sec.

There was a group that supported the Liberal Party and, logically, to link the arguments he was making, if

it's not good for the Conservative Party, it ought not to be good for any other group supporting the Liberal Party either. That is the logical conclusion I come to based on what I heard you, Minister of Municipal Affairs, say, and the member from Burlington. You both make the same arguments leading to reform of third party advertising. I just wanted to support you in that regard.

The Liberal government does what it always does: It gives a little and holds back a lot. It is in their nature to only provide just enough to say, "We've created major reform." In the old days, after they got elected in 2003, they would say "historic changes." They don't say that anymore. Mercifully, they don't say that these changes are "historic" or "never seen before" because they realize what a drag it is just to listen to that, right? So that's good. You've made some progress.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Full-day kindergarten—historic.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Just take a look at my speech that I gave the other day.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I heard it.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You heard it.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was surprised your leader was opposed.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The point, Minister of Municipal Affairs, is that there are some good changes here; there are. The few little changes you made: Voters would be able to vote by special ballot, which includes voting by mail and taking a ballot to their returning officer in person. How could you dispute that? Member from Burlington, I think you made the same point. That's okay, right?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Yes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: She agrees; we agree. We think—

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's historic.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Historic? Come on.

Post-secondary students would be allowed to choose whether they want to vote in the electoral district where they reside temporarily while they attend an educational institution or where they reside permanently. This has been a problem for a long, long time because you have thousands of students studying in other than where they live, and they have to make a choice: "What do we do? Do we have the time to be able to leave our studies, leave this city and go back to where we were to go and vote?" And then get back to your studies in the other city. This is the kind of decision-making process they had to engage in all the time.

My personal view is, the majority of students decided it's not worth the trouble: "It is not worth the trouble for me to have to spend the money, which I may not have, take the day to go there and vote, stay there overnight and come back the next day"—not worth the time, the effort, the money or the trouble to do that. We effectively disenfranchised a whole lot of students in the past, so this is another measure that we think is okay; it's good.

The third point is that the CEO would be permitted to use new technologies, such as voting machines, that would assist persons with disabilities to cast their ballot

privately and independently at returning office advance polls. I think this is okay, too. Given the experience we've had in the by-election in Toronto Centre, where one person with a disability had to, with great effort, get to the voting poll, had to descend five steps on his own with great difficulty because he's in a wheelchair—but he wanted to vote. With great difficulty, he went down those steps somehow and voted. That ought not to be the experience of people with disabilities in their right to go to vote and not have an inaccessible way to get to that ballot.

This is a right they should be able to enjoy without having to struggle to get there. This is a right they should be able to enjoy without having to say in the last 10, 20 or 30 years, "We need to have accessible voting stations." They keep lobbying—that is, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance—for entrenched regulations that would give them the right to be able to go to vote, as opposed to, in each and every instance where they've been denied that right, having to go to the Chief Electoral Officer and/or the ministry and/or the government to say, "This is happening each and every election. It has got to stop." And I agree with them: It should stop. It shouldn't be something that they have to negotiate every election. It shouldn't be something that every election, they go to the Chief Electoral Officer and say, "Not again," and to hear from them, "Yes, we're dealing with it," and then, every election, there's another problem. It ought not to be happening. So while some advances have been made, no permanent regulatory framework has been established to solve that problem for people with disabilities.

Obviously, they want hearings. They want to be able to come to talk to the committee about how we entrench in law accessibility for people with disabilities, and we're looking forward to hearing them give us their view on this matter vis-à-vis this particular bill.

The other thing that this government has done is to end the politicizing of poll workers. I think that's good, too. I think the member from Burlington might have mentioned that—I don't remember—but my suspicion is that they agree with this, that it isn't right that the member who is elected has the power to refer poll workers to the CEO, and by so doing, hire those individuals to do the job now. It doesn't mean that most of those people are not able—I'm sure that most of them are able—but they're directed there politically by the person elected. That's wrong. It's wrong for any political party to have that power to do that.

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The governing party, of course, has the majority of influence because they've got more members than the rest of us do. So they have more political influence by way of sending workers to that election for the few dollars they earn for the couple of days that they get those jobs. It's not a big deal; it's not like you're earning thousands and thousands of dollars. But, still, it's political influence exercised mostly by the governing party and, indeed, by all of us who are elected. I just think it's wrong.

My suspicion is that a lot of members don't even do it because they don't even know they can. It's quite possible that a lot of members haven't been doing it because they didn't know they could, but I suspect the governing party knows and that most of the government members would have been told that they could and should be doing it. I just think it's wrong. This ends that particular practice.

Some of these points in the bill that are positive are good, but as the member from Burlington said, what is missing is what is wrong about the bill; what is missing is what should be debated—strongly; what is missing tells us about what the party fears or is worried about and why they haven't done the things that I'm about to talk about. One of them was third party advertising, which has already been debated by Conservative members and I'm sure by my colleagues as well. My friend Michael Prue from the riding of Beaches—East York spoke for a whole hour in the last couple of days in this regard. He has covered that as well.

Third party advertising has to be dealt with, so the question I ask is, why hasn't the government done that? My answer is that they haven't done it because they profit from not having any strong legislation dealing with third party advertising. That is clear to me. The reason why you don't deal with it is because it must be good for the governing party not to touch it.

So when you hear the Minister of Municipal Affairs saying, "But look what the National Citizens Coalition did 15, 20 years ago," we say that's correct—exactly. And if you disagree with the politics of the National Citizens Coalition and what they did and what they were trying to do, why not end that particular practice by ensuring, through strong regulation, that no group can ever influence a political process unfairly or disproportionately?

The government takes advantage of something that exists because it brings to them political advantage. I think it's just wrong, and they don't have the courage to deal with that. I just think it's political opportunism and nothing less than that.

The other, more important thing for me is ending the practice of corporate and union contributions to political parties.

Mr. David Zimmer: Union contributions?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And union contributions as well.

Mr. David Zimmer: Oh, that's a surprise. You'd be in trouble with your base.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Not at all.

Mr. David Zimmer: Oh, you're going to be in big trouble with your base.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But you would be in trouble with the base, too, because 40% of union money comes to the Liberal Party. You would be in trouble, too.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Gentlemen.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The argument is that we're in trouble—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Through you—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Gentlemen. Thank you.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I try to keep my eyes both on the left and the right here.

Mr. David Zimmer: Watch out for the middle.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The member from Willowdale says, "Oh, you'd be in trouble," but they would be in greater trouble because 40% of their funding comes from unions and 40% to 50% of the other money comes from corporations. They're in real, real trouble. The Liberal Party is so frightened to deal with that issue that they dare not even talk about it.

The member from Willowdale thinks he's trapping me by saying, "Oh, the NDP's lost without union funds," without understanding that they're the ones who are the big losers, because not only do they get a big, big chunk of union money but they get a big chunk of corporate money.

The point is that it's political influence that we would like to end. The Canadian government has ended that practice. It was your Liberal government that did that. God bless them; sometimes they do the right thing.

Mr. David Zimmer: That's Ottawa; this is Toronto.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yeah. In Saskatchewan, in Manitoba and in Quebec they have ended the practice of accepting corporate and union donations. Other provinces have done that; the Canadian government has done that. Surely the Ontario government, through the Liberal Party, could take a stab at it. I don't think it would be too hard. End the practice of influence on political parties.

Mr. David Zimmer: And where would the money come from?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And where would the money come from? That's okay; I can tell you. Here's what the Canadian government did; here's how it works: The federal government gives a 50% reimbursement to any party that gets 2% nationally or 5% in each district. So if you run a party and you get 5% in, say, eight or 10 ridings, then those eight or 10 ridings would be eligible for a rebate. What do you think? Is that a good thing?

Mr. John O'Toole: Through the Chair.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I think it's a good thing, Speaker, through you to the member from Willowdale. I think it works. It's the way to go. It's what you've got to do to be able to give individual voters the right to say, "This is where my vote is going. This is my influence to that political party. They're not beholden to the unions necessarily and they're not beholden to the corporations necessarily. You are beholden; you, the government and the members, are beholden to me." I like that. That is the democracy that we should want and desire and that we should be fighting for. That is something that Liberal members could champion and they would look good.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I think they would look good.

That's what is missing in this bill. That's why this particular bill is not very historic. That's why it does a few nice little things but no more than that. It doesn't take on the big challenges; it refuses to. It is afraid to do so, and they are afraid because doing what I'm recommending—or what the Conservative folks were recommending through third party advertising—would damage their political future, it seems.

It doesn't have to. It shouldn't have to. But if you look at the political influence, look what they are able to do in Ontario, both the corporations—they've got a few more dollars than I do—and the unions, to be fair, are able to contribute to each party \$7,500 per year times the indexation factor; to each constituency association, \$1,000 per year times the indexation factor; to constituency associations or any one party, \$5,000 per year times the indexation factor; to each candidate, \$1,000 per campaign times the indexation factor; to candidates endorsed by one party, \$5,000 total per campaign times the indexation factor. Do you see what I'm saying, John?

Hon. John Gerretsen: How about public financing?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Do you see what I'm saying? Do you see all that money that can go to a political party? Do you see how they buy influence? Do you think corporations give because they are magnanimous, that they are kind and responsible citizens? That they don't want to influence Mr. Gerretsen, the Minister of the Environment; they really don't want to influence him, but they just want to be kind to him by giving a few generous dollars because they love him, not to influence the kind of political direction that comes through the regulations and laws that he introduces by way of bills in this Legislature? John, please. They gave you the money. They give you money to influence you.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Where do I send my donation to you?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Send it anytime you want: any day, any hour. Give it to me in person; you don't have to send it. Save on the stamp. Bring it across the way. I can take it just as easily, just to help out.

So you understand: Corporations give to take. They give to influence. And that is the way they dominate the political process. All the politicians know that if I get \$7,500 from someone, do you think I'm not going to watch myself when I introduce a bill in this place? Do you think I'm not going to be careful? Do you think I'm not going to give him the meeting that he requests and/or demands? Of course I'm going to give him that meeting. Because when \$7,500 plus \$1,000 plus \$1,000 comes my way, I'm going to have to have a meeting with that individual. But not John Gerretsen; he's above it all. He transcends political influence. You're so good.

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Hon. John Gerretsen: So are you, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thanks so much.

It's about influence. I want to end that political influence. I want to give the power back to individuals to be able to feel good about the choices they make vis-à-vis the vote they give to that political party. That is what

democracy ought to be about and that's what this Liberal government is afraid of. They want and need corporate donations. They want and need the union donations. They want both: union donations, which they get—

Hon. John Gerretsen: I thought you were getting union donations.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, you get 40%. You get as much as we do, God bless you. I don't know how you do it. I don't know how unions could give you money when there's nothing in this House that you ever do for them. I don't know how they do it, but you get half from them and the other half comes from corporations. You benefit so much from both of those two sectors. It's time to end it, John. Time to end it. Time to be strong. Time to change this law, make this bill stronger than it is.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Johnson: It's a pleasure to rise. I appreciate the comments of the member from Trinity-Spadina. When he was discussing the percentages of who gets what, we must be making pretty good use of our donations.

The Election Statute Law Amendment Act of 2009 would, if we pass it, modernize election administration and improve the voting process, making our election system in Ontario fair, more flexible and accessible to persons with disabilities. The initiatives contained in this legislation are based on the recommendations of the select committee of all parties. It will improve the voting process.

One of the things I know in my riding—we've got many seniors—is the accessibility issue: allowing these people easier access to vote. It will improve that and make it easier for them as we go forward.

The other thing that I'm happy about is that it will improve the voting process for students. One of the things is the lack of people voting; our voter turnouts have been dismal in the last few years. A 40% voter turnout seems to be standard, which means that a small minority of people are having huge influence: those that are going out and voting.

Inspiring young people to vote would be a good thing. Parts of this bill, by allowing greater access for students and some flexibility for them with different types of balloting, would be a good thing. If we can get more young people enthused in the process, it would be great. There was a process that was started a couple of elections ago called Kids Voting Canada, which is run by a fellow named Taylor Gunn, to inspire young people in our schools to move forward and get involved in the process. They've had great results with it.

I believe that this is a good step forward in improving the election process and getting more people involved. Anything that we can do to inspire more members of our communities to do so is a good thing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I always attend, or try to attend, when the member from Trinity-Spadina speaks. He

brings passion and knowledge to the debate. More importantly, I completely concur with his remarks and sentiments on third party advertising.

Other issues: the permanent electoral list, the boundaries commission and special ballots. The special ballot, I approve of. The permanent electoral list, which eliminates the enumeration issue, is quite important as long as all parties have access, whenever, to this list and the system that it's going to be updated on regularly. The boundaries commission: The Liberal Party is inconsistent there as well.

I'm looking at the actual, official list of the contributions on the third party advertising report. I'm looking at one at random here out of a list of many pages. Arrow Communications Consulting: I'd like to know the principals, the names involved. Here's this one company, Arrow Communications. Look it up; see who they are, who the people are. They must be connected to Premier McGuinty somehow. They contributed to the Liberal Party. Here's the number of contributions: \$9,600; \$108,000; \$46,000; \$318,000; \$212,000; \$4,000; \$4,800; \$55,000; \$4,000. I'm quoting an actual report that this company, Arrow Communications—if they're involved in eHealth scandal or other consulting, we have the link.

What we're asking for is to do the right thing and put an end to this third party advertising. This is political patronage at the worst and most obvious phase. So I commend the member from Trinity-Spadina. I'm pleased to share this list with him.

One more comment: The CAW contributed \$300,000—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: This is a quite an interesting discussion that's going on today. I see certain groups are leaving out certain things. My friends from the official opposition are not talking about corporate donations, which is probably the base to their whole fundraising. And the Liberal member from Toronto said, "What are you going to do if you don't get union donations?" Well, our union-based donations are probably less than what the Liberals get.

I also think that if you look at the federal rules, the NDP federally now has more money than they ever did because they dropped these union and corporate donations, and they get \$1.58 per voter in Canada as a rebate. We have more money in our coffers than we ever did. So, of the three parties, this rule would probably be more fair to us than anybody because we don't have access to the corporate donations or some of the union groups that back the Liberals.

Really, I think it would be a fair playing field for everybody if you got per voter what you're entitled to. A lot of times, when we're second place, we lose a riding maybe by 200 votes, and if you based it on how much you get per voter, we'd have a lot more money in our coffers and be able to compete fairly instead of being financially burdened all the time because of the situation we are in.

I think this would be a good thing overall for everybody. It may affect the other two parties more so than us because of their great reliance on donations from corporations. Trust me, we don't get a lot of donations from corporations, and that's the way it goes. Unfortunately, that's the way it is, but we do get donations from individuals.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to enter into this debate and make a few remarks, in particular about the comments made by our colleague from Trinity–Spadina—always with great passion, but today I found a certain lack of logic in some of his remarks.

He states that 40% of union donations come to the Ontario Liberal Party. He claims that such donations may lead to some sort of influence or some potential favouritism towards those who donate to the democratic process. But then he goes on to say that in fact we do, as a Liberal Party, nothing for unions. Somehow I don't quite understand how you can have it both ways.

In terms of Bill 231, there are some aspects that I'm particularly happy about. As my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has stated, the issue of seniors and those with disabilities is particularly troubling. I well remember the last couple of provincial elections visiting polling stations and seeing the issue of several steps being required to go up or down in order to cast one's ballot. Certainly, there have been stories of individuals leaving their wheelchairs at the top of the stairs to somehow stumble down to, in fact, cast their ballot. This is a very difficult situation for many of those with disabilities and for seniors. Obviously, voting by proxy for many people is not an option that they wish to exercise.

These changes will in fact increase access. We know that we've had some really low voter turnout in the last few elections—only 53% in 2007. So all these actions will in fact boost the opportunity to cast a ballot.

1000

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Trinity–Spadina has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I thank all the members for their comments. I want to respond to my friend from Oak Ridges–Markham because she thought there was a loss of logic at some place. I want to explain that loss of logic, because the loss of logic isn't mine. The loss of logic relates to the contradictions that I have to deal with as they relate to unions. Many unions, of course, support the Liberal Party because they're in power. They're hoping that, by supporting them, some benefits will accrue to their members—not because they often do, but because they feel they could. That contradiction has always hurt me a little bit. It's not my contradiction; it is inherent in the way unions operate, trying to protect their members in the best way they can. The best way they can is sometimes to support Liberals, and I could never, never accept that. I've been here for 20 years, and Liberals do very, very little for unions and union members. In spite of that,

they still—many of them—send their money to the Liberal Party, and that has puzzled me for ever so long.

But I want to say, with respect to the bill—it's a nice bill. It really is. It won't hurt. Some of these elements are really nice, and we should be doing it. I already commented on that. But the Liberals are not bold; they never will be. They're always tepid in their approach to politics. They're always cautious. They're risk-averse. They never want to do something that ought to be done. What we ought to do is make sure we deal with third party advertising, and they refuse to do it. What we ought to be doing is making sure we end corporate and union donations to political parties to end their influence on parties. This is where the government fails to do the right thing. That's the problem with the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased in the time remaining this morning to be able to enter into the debate on Bill 231. I'm going to spend most of my time probably talking about what's in the bill rather than what is not in the bill.

I think the member for Trinity–Spadina's final comments were about the Liberals not being bold and being tepid and risk-averse. I think we truly reflect, to a large extent, what the people of Ontario want, and thus we have a fairly significant majority in this place. They want people who are going to be cautious, who are going to think about what they do and act accordingly.

To the bill itself: I'm very pleased to be saying—actually, yesterday, I spoke for just two minutes when we were making some responses, and I want to pick up where I left off. I was telling you a little story, which, for me, bears repeating, and I think it bears repeating for a number of people, on at least one or two aspects of the bill, particularly as it relates to the issues of proxies and special ballots, and as it might relate similarly to post-secondary students having the option to choose where they cast their ballot.

When I was in municipal governance—I think it was probably my second or third election as mayor; it was subsequent to my being in that office—a gentleman came in with his daughter. She had turned 18—I don't think she was 19 at that point—and it was her first-ever opportunity to vote. There hadn't been a provincial or federal election. But she couldn't be in the municipality to cast her ballot. As a matter of fact, she was away at school, if I recall.

We had a nice conversation, her and her dad and myself, in the office. I thought at first that her dad had brought her in to meet the mayor face to face, see what municipal politics was about, what the issues were and help her to get educated about the political process. Certainly that was part of it, but when we finished the conversation, she said that since she was going to be unable to cast her ballot for herself, she asked me if I would cast her ballot as her proxy.

I must say, at that time that was an honour, and it remains an honour, that a young person in my constitu-

ency—at that time, municipally—would come to me, hear what I had to say and ask if I would cast her vote for her, not only for myself. She said to me at that point—because I asked her what she would like me to do in regard to a regional position and a local position. She had a candidate on one of those two positions that she wanted to have the ballot cast for, which I was happy to do. In the third choice that she had available to herself at that point, she said she would trust my judgment to cast the ballot on her behalf.

As nice as that was and as proud as I was to do that—I remember it so distinctly—the provisions of this bill would allow that student, that young person, or anyone else at least one of two options. One would be, if they just simply couldn't be there for some reason to cast their ballot, to have a special ballot. That's not only for students but also for those who can't vote, who can't get to the polls on the day available or in any advance poll that might be available. It reminds me as well of those who are hospitalized. I recall collecting ballots of people who wanted to vote but wouldn't have the opportunity, and proxy voting for people in the hospital.

Special ballots would allow those people to cast their ballots effectively when they're hospitalized and might not otherwise have the opportunity. The list in that regard would go on to all of those people who, for whatever number of reasons, cannot cast a ballot at the time available to them but have the opportunity, through a special ballot provision, to do that.

As I understand it, we're the only jurisdiction provincially and nationally, in essence, that doesn't have that provision within our legislation. It seems appropriate that we effectively catch up with the federal government and every other jurisdiction in the country.

Mr. Mike Colle: What's the distinction between a special ballot and a proxy?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The member from—help me—

Mr. Mike Colle: Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: —Eglinton—Lawrence was asking, "What's the distinction between the proxy and the special ballot?" The proxy is where when you ask someone to vote on your behalf. In the example, the young person came and asked me if I would vote on her behalf. In that instance, we were allowed to cast one ballot for someone else in addition to ourselves, on a proxy.

A special ballot is a ballot that the individual gets to cast, a mail-in ballot, for that particular purpose on a special provision. They get to vote themselves, on behalf of themselves, for whomever they want, but they don't have to do it through a proxy provision, and they don't have to do it at the location of the ballot box to which they would otherwise be prescribed or necessarily on the day of the particular election. It gives to the individual the opportunity to cast their own vote for their chosen candidate, as opposed to allowing someone else to do that on their behalf.

I can say, speaking of the young people who are at university—I was mentioning that—those who will then be given a choice as to where they want to cast that

ballot—and that's always a bit of a contradiction. They live in one jurisdiction, and have for some time, with their family, yet they're attending school somewhere outside of the municipality, and they spend most of their time there, for two, three, four or more years. It becomes their home in that locale. Their residence with their parents, presumably, in their hometown no longer really is the place to which they are connected.

When they're casting their ballot, not only do they want to cast their ballot in the context provincially of a government, they want to cast their ballot in the context of the member who will be representing their interests in this place. Their interests at that point in time are not necessarily the interests of their hometown. Their interests are where they are going to school, the community in which they live and the issues that affect them in that community.

There are a number of provisions within this legislation. Those are just a couple that I think are important provisions.

Certainly, increasing access for those with disabilities is an important part of what we're doing. As we move through the process of making this an accessible province for all, it's important in this process that we ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that there are no hiccups in the system. We've heard, so eloquently put forward during the debate, about an incident in the recent by-election where an individual with a disability could not access the polling booth in the basement of a building and, as I understand the conversation, had to be assisted in one fashion or another from the ground level into the basement. That's not an acceptable standard in Ontario today, and it's one that we have to be ever-vigilant about. Provisions within this legislation that will increase access for persons with disabilities are important provisions.

The use of electronics for the purpose of voting, at this point now, is increasingly well established. Municipalities throughout Ontario have been using voting machinery effectively without problem for a number of years. They have proven to be accurate when there have been concerns about a ballot, when they've had to be recounted in some fashion. I would suggest that 100% of the time, the machines have proven to be an effective and efficient means by which people can vote. It's time we started to use the same provisions. It's time we started to look more carefully at opportunities to use technology effectively.

I think this will be a step, and there will probably be future steps in which we will look more intently at using even more current technologies: the Internet systems that are available to us for voting purposes. That is not a provision in this legislation, but at least it takes us down the road of starting to think about technology as a strategy, as opposed to hard pieces of paper in the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or millions of pieces of paper that have to get counted on election night.

There are provisions in here that provide some additional flexibility for the Chief Electoral Officer. This is far more administrative than the public would see, but I

think there are important provisions that remove from the capacity of the system for primarily the governing party to have a greater degree of influence on the appointment of officials in each of the ridings for the purposes of the electoral process. I think those are good provisions. Those are provisions that the public—although they won't see them on a day-to-day basis, they certainly would appreciate knowing that this is a process of selection that is removed from the political body having the opportunity to influence in any particular fashion.

The work that was done on this select committee by virtue of having members from all three parties—and I understand that there were dissenting opinions, but that's the nature of this process too. When you don't have a standing committee per se, often select committees provide provisions for a dissenting opinion when there's not full and 100% agreement. It gives the opposition parties—primarily the opposition, but I suppose it could be a government member too—the opportunity to express their dissent with what's being proposed.

Having said that, I know that the member from Willowdale and the member from Vaughan were, from the government side, active and experienced members. I know that the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills has a long history in this place and has brought a tremendous amount of expertise. I'm sorry, but I don't know the member from the third party who sat on the select committee. I just don't have that in front of me.

Interjection: Peter Kormos.

Mr. Mike Colle: The member from Niagara.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The member from Niagara, from Welland—regardless, people with considerable experience in this place brought to bear in the process of bringing this legislation forward. I know they gave it full and due deliberation. It's been said broadly that the provisions in the legislation are provisions, if I understood it right, that are generally agreed upon around this place. There are always matters not in legislation that opposition, in particular, would like to see in legislation, and that's certainly part of their role. They've articulated that succinctly over the course of the debate. That being said, I believe this to be good legislation in the context of reform that will serve well the electors in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, with that, if there's time remaining for questions and answers, and if not, then I presume you'll advise us accordingly.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 10:15 of the clock, pursuant to standing order 8, this House will recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of page Arusa Mithani and the member from Mississauga-Brampton South, to welcome

her mother, Nadia Mithani, and her grandmother Badra Mulk Ashraf Ali to the Legislature today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I take this opportunity to welcome to the Speaker's gallery my brother, Joe Peters. Welcome, Joe.

ORAL QUESTIONS

DIABETES REGISTRY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. Ontario families are finding that the McGuinty Liberals can't be trusted to keep their throne speech commitments. On page 9 of his last throne speech, Premier McGuinty said he would introduce a new comprehensive diabetes strategy, and in budget 2008, you ramped up funding for the flagship project, a diabetes registry to be created by the now infamous eHealth Ontario. You made the promise and you spent the money, but still, no Registry. Why make throne speech commitments you don't intend to keep?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm delighted to take the question.

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Why don't they listen to us sometimes?

Let me just tell you a little bit about the 2007 throne speech and the achievements that followed from that. We talked about full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds; my honourable colleague knows that starts in September. We talked about further improving the graduation rates; they continue to go up. We talked about investing in public transit with MoveOntario 2020; we have done that. We talked about continuing to raise the minimum wage; we continue to do that. We talked about putting in place the Ontario child benefit; we have done that. We talked about expanding our wait times strategy for emergency rooms and tracking hospital infections; we're doing that. We talked about putting in place nurse-practitioner-led clinics, the first of their kind in North America; we're on our way to 25. We talked about banning trans fats in our schools; we've done that as well.

There's more to be done, but we have done a lot working together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: With respect, my question was about a diabetes registry, and I didn't hear anything about that in the Premier's answer.

Premier, Ontario patients weren't excited about the "promise" of a diabetes registry; they expected a diabetes registry, and you said that they would have one by this time last year. In an October 2008 eHealth Ontario presentation, you told everyone, "By the spring of 2009, Ontario will have a diabetes registry actively used by patients and physicians...."

The billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle showed us there wasn't a lack of money involved. So what's holding

up the creation and operation of a fully functioning diabetes registry?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, this is something that my honourable colleague and her party opposed, but now she's demanding that we do it.

Let me just tell you how far we've come on that score. We've nearly tripled diabetes funding since 2003. We have now created 153 diabetes education teams across the province. We are the first province to fully fund insulin pumps for children and youth with type 1 diabetes.

These are all initiatives that my honourable colleague and her colleagues stand against. We will continue to move forward with our diabetes strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, back to the registry: Ontario patients right now see a Premier who would rather make a bunch of new promises than make good on his existing promises, which is what we're seeing with this registry. It took until May 20, 2009, before Infrastructure Ontario finally got around to posting a request for proposal to create the diabetes registry, but this means the RFP was posted after the registry was supposed to be up and running. The infrastructure minister responsible for the RFP was George Smitherman.

Did you break your promise to deliver a diabetes registry now because George Smitherman left or because you put him in charge of it in the first place?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Putting in place a diabetes registry, the first of its kind in Canada, if not North America, is not an easy thing to do; I want to say that right now. But I think my honourable colleague must acknowledge the progress that we have made, and I outlined some of that, including tripling the diabetes funding since 2003, our new insulin pumps for children and youth, and our 153 new diabetes education teams. There is more work to do.

I know that my honourable colleague is not sometimes fond of how ambitious we are on behalf of Ontario families when it comes to putting in place a diabetes registry, but it's something that we will continue to work on, and we're determined to get there. We're determined to succeed on their behalf.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is for the Premier as well. Here's proof that Dalton McGuinty's throne speech promises can't be trusted. On page 9 of your last throne speech, you said you would hire 9,000 new nurses. But as the Ottawa Hospital has just learned, you're firing nurses, 190 of them, not hiring them. Now you say you'll hire more nurses by 2011. Why should patients of the Ottawa Hospital believe you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to speak to this as well. My honourable colleague is a representative of a party which, when it was in government, closed the Riverside Hospital in Ottawa and the Grace Hospital in Ottawa. They tried to close the Montfort Hospital in

Ottawa and they tried to kill the children's cardiac unit at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. That's just so we're clear as to what their record is.

We have provided a 44% increase in base funding since 2003 to Ottawa hospitals. I'll contrast that with their \$58-million cut. We're up \$408 million; they cut by \$58 million. In supplementaries I'll talk about what we're doing specifically to hire more nurses in Ottawa as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Yet again, Ontario families are seeing that Premier McGuinty makes promises that, because of his wasteful ways, he can't deliver. Here's further proof of his misguided priorities.

This afternoon, the public accounts committee is going to hear about the waste in the assistive devices program, which costs Ontario taxpayers \$350 million a year. The auditor tells us the abuse in this program is in the tens of millions of dollars.

Assistive devices cost Ontario twice as much per capita as other provinces, so this program could be cut without compromising any service to any Ontario patients. It could be cut because of the waste. This means that there is money available to hire nurses at the Ottawa Hospital.

Why should Ontarians believe you, Mr. Premier, that you will be able to keep any health care promises in the next throne speech?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I see that my honourable colleagues in the Conservative Party can't talk about health care and not reference cutting in the same sentence. Nothing's changed.

I want to come back to nurses, though, because my honourable colleague made reference to nurses in Ottawa. Since 2003, there are more than 650 new nurses working in Ottawa hospitals, I'm very proud to say. Today, there are 200 vacant nursing staff positions at the Ottawa Hospital; 650 new nurses hired and 200 nursing staff positions available in the city of Ottawa right now through the Ottawa Hospital. So again, when it comes to whether it's our investment in nurses, building a new medical school, investing in more MRIs, CTs, getting wait times down, putting in place nurse-practitioner-led clinics, I like to think in Ontario we are leading together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: The Premier's pattern of saying one thing and doing another just doesn't stop. The waste in eHealth, the billion dollars there, the waste in the assistive devices program is astonishing. If we saved this money we could hire the nurses we need in this province.

Last year, we heard about the \$1-billion eHealth slush fund that paid Liberal friends instead of going to health care like hiring nurses, like keeping 190 nurses that are being fired from the Ottawa Hospital. With priorities like that, Premier McGuinty, how can anything you say about health care be trusted by the public of Ottawa?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, I've outlined, I thought, in some detail the progress that we've made: 650 new nurses working in Ottawa hospitals, a 44% increase

in base funding since 2003. That's \$408 million, in contrast to their \$58 million cut.

I can also say that when we came into office there were three MRI machines in Ottawa; now there are eight. That's 20,000 more scans every single year. Again, I contrast that with my colleague's and his party's determination to find ways to make cuts to health care. We're not going there; we need to continue to find ways to improve the quality of health care that we provide to all our families.

1040

PATIENT SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Laurie Johnston's tragic story has made all of us, especially women, question our health care system. Ontario families need reassurance that the current investigation in Windsor will do some good and actually protect patients from further tragedies. They need reassurance because the last time this happened, it seems that not much at all was learned.

In April 2008, Grey Bruce Health Services found that one pathologist made the wrong diagnosis 36 times. Why didn't the ensuing investigation, which took place two years ago, prevent the problems we are now seeing in Windsor?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. First of all, I want to take this, my first opportunity in the House to speak to this, to express my sympathies to the women affected by this horrific development of events and to provide reassurance to women throughout the province. These are our mothers, our wives, our sisters and our daughters for whom I know we all care a great deal.

I think the Minister of Health is doing exactly what's needed in the circumstances. She has launched an external third party review. Three expert doctors are going to focus on surgical errors and pathology results in the three Essex county hospitals. I understand that the hospital and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario have also launched their formal reviews. We look forward to acquiring this information at the earliest possible opportunity and taking whatever steps are needed to ensure the continuing safety of women when it comes to their health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The error rate for the Grey Bruce pathologist was six times the average; 30% of his cases were cancer diagnoses. Grey Bruce Health Services dismissed the pathologist and initiated an internal review that found that cancer cases were misdiagnosed. This triggered an external investigation that combed through tens of thousands of records.

In the wake of that investigation, what action did this government take to ensure that the same thing would never happen again?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't speak specifically to that particular matter, but what I do want to say to my

honourable colleague, and to women in particular, is that we are very determined to find out what has gone awry in Essex county hospitals.

I also want to provide some reassurance to all Ontarians that we have in place a surgical safety checklist protocol that ensures that operating room teams are following the appropriate steps and actions. That has proven to reduce rates of death and complications for patients. It's required in all Ontario hospitals as of April of this year, and we will have public reporting on compliance rates starting in July. That's a practical step that we're putting in place to ensure there is a special protocol that's involved, that's followed and that makes sure the physicians and the nurses are doing everything they need to do to reduce our rates of complication.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the answer to my actual question is that this government did virtually nothing two years ago, because the similarities between Grey Bruce and Windsor are striking. It's as if the Grey Bruce investigation never even happened. In both cases, hospitals found potentially serious pathology errors.

How many more investigations need to take place in this province before this government addresses the systemic problems in pathology and reassures Ontarians that their health care is actually in good hands?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would argue there is considerable wisdom to be found in the statement of the NDP health critic, who recently said: "The last thing you want to do is send panic or send messages that say the system is not safe." There was also, "Right now, I agree with what they are doing. Let's take it one step at a time. Let's look at what's happening in Windsor."

I think that is the appropriate thing for us to do in the circumstances. I think we ought to be deliberate, thoughtful and thorough, and that's exactly what we intend to do through our external third party review. Understand that we're doing that in supplement to the hospital and the College of Physicians and Surgeons with their own independent review as well.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is over to the Premier as well. Ontarians are soon going to have some answers about the terrible tragedy that took place on December 27 in the Niagara region. The coroner's inquest into the death of Reilly Anzovino will determine whether this young woman's tragic death may have been prevented had the emergency room of Fort Erie not been forced to shut its doors last year.

In the face of growing health care cuts, Ontarians are looking to this government for assurance. If the coroner's jury determines that the ER closures in Port Colborne and Fort Erie contributed to Reilly Anzovino's death, will the Premier commit to reopening them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't think it would be appropriate for me to comment on the outcome that my colleague is speculating about.

But let me just say, on behalf of the government, that we welcome this review by the coroner's office. We look forward to receiving the jury's recommendations, and we look forward to acting on those in any way that serves the interests of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Certainly none of us would want to prejudge the outcome of the coroner's investigation, but Ontario families tell us this tragedy has left them worried. They're looking for reassurance and they're looking for it now. They want to see responsible planning to ensure the health care system is there when we need it. Instead, we're seeing reckless, random cuts that leave people without the front-line services they need.

The question is a simple one: Will the government reconsider the closure of these ERs if the coroner finds those decisions played a role in this tragic incident?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Of course, I have to take issue with my honourable colleague's characterization of the approach that we've brought to health care. We have more nurses. We have more doctors. We have more medical technologies than ever before. We're building hospitals, we're expanding hospitals. Some 900,000 more Ontarians now have access to family physicians. We have the first nurse-practitioner-led clinics in North America. We're funding more drugs than ever before.

I know that my honourable colleague would admit in her heart of hearts that to characterize this as a series of cuts is just, well, nonsensical. The fact of the matter is that we're moving forward and making considerable new investments in health care with a view to ensuring that we provide better quality health care to all our families. That's what we've done and that's what we will continue to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Notwithstanding the Premier's claims, families across Ontario actually want to see a government plan to ensure that our health system will be there when we need it and when our children need it. Instead, what they're really getting, and what they're seeing day in and day out, are random cuts that leave communities without front-line health services.

With surgeries being cancelled, services being cut back at hospitals across the province, all Ontarians want is assurance, and they expect that assurance to come from the top. Will the Premier today stop hiding behind the LHINs and take some responsibility for health care in Ontario and assure Ontario families that ERs will be there for them when they need them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will take this opportunity to ask Ontarians to take a close look at our record of new increases—in fact, dramatic new increases—in their health care services in all our communities. I want to reassure them that we will always hold uppermost in our minds the tremendous value that they attach to health care in their communities. That's something that has always informed our government policies and will continue to do so long into the future.

1050

PATIENT SAFETY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is again for the Premier. It's gone from hard to impossible to trust that the McGuinty government is going to honour their campaign and throne speech promises. On page 8 of your last throne speech, the Premier said, "We can measure a society's depth by how well it treats" its ill. Well, Ontario is not measuring up well. As a result of the problems at the Windsor hospital involving unnecessary mastectomies, pathologists are raising alarms. They say they are reviewing 30 to 35 cases a day and that one said case can be 30 slides or three slides, but that "You are expected to have a fast turnaround time.... The physicians need their reports." Well, the last time Ontario patients witnessed the Premier's need for speed, we got the eHealth boondoggle. How many pathologists could have been hired with the billions of dollars that you wasted in the eHealth boondoggle?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question on the issue of pathologists. As the member opposite knows, we are taking the situation in Windsor very seriously. We have appointed three physicians to go to Windsor to examine and understand what happened there so we can learn the lessons that need to be learned from this situation. The three physicians are very highly regarded: Dr. Barry McLellan, the CEO of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, who was previously the chief coroner for the province of Ontario, will be coordinating the investigation. Dr. Robin McLeod is a surgical lead in the surgical oncology program at Cancer Care Ontario; she will focus on surgical errors in this investigation. Dr. John Srigley is the clinical leader of the pathology and laboratory medicine program at Cancer Care Ontario. He's also the current president of the Ontario Association of Pathologists—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Clearly there's a much bigger problem here that needs to be addressed, other than the isolated case in Windsor. The Premier has promised in past throne speeches that Ontario patients will get the care they need when they need it, but the problems in Windsor reveal that he's failing on that commitment, too. A media report last evening revealed the case of Paul Renaud of Windsor, whose first pathology report said that his lung cancer had not spread. Fortunately for Paul, his wife had private insurance that allowed him to go to the United States to get a second opinion, which showed that in fact his cancer had spread. Why do you say you'll deliver care based on need, not on the size of your bank account or station in life, when Paul Renaud had to have private insurance to go to the United States to get the medical care he needed when he needed it? Why?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite has raised the issue of the number of pathologists that we

have and the workload of pathologists. That is one of the questions that we hope to get answered through this review. But I think in fairness, it's important to know that we have quadrupled the number of pathologists who are practising every year. When the party opposite was in charge of the system, there were seven pathologists graduating every year; we have now increased that to 29.

We've made the right investments. We're rebuilding a system that was on very shaky ground when we took over in 2003. I think the member opposite, if she were actually being honest with herself and with the people of Ontario, would acknowledge that we have made tremendous progress when it comes to health care in this province.

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Earlier this week, the not-for-profit Greater Toronto Hockey League announced that annual team registration fees will double to \$2,000. That's at least \$60 more per player. The GTHL says the increase is due to the harmonized sales tax, which will increase the cost of ice rental. The budget promised that the HST would be fiscally neutral for non-profits. Why is the minister breaking his budgetary promise?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I can't comment as to why the particular fee that the member referenced has doubled. I can assure him that it's not as a result of an 8% provincial sales tax that's part of a broader tax cut package. I remind him that there are a variety of sales tax credits for families and for individuals. Non-profits are largely exempt, absolutely; the numbers are detailed in the background document. Again, to attribute a doubling of those fees to the HST is just inaccurate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Perhaps the minister could look at other situations where non-profits have problems with his new tax. The minister promised that his rebate system would leave non-profits no worse off. In the minister's hometown, the Windsor Minor Hockey Association is saying that the HST will cost them \$30,000 for ice rental alone. Other recreational programs like the family summer swim pass will jump 10 bucks. Can the minister explain his broken promise? Can he justify taxing families for encouraging their kids to be active? Perhaps he can give us some detail on this.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd be happy to. In fact, 93% of Ontario families will see a decrease in the taxes they pay as a result of the tax package. There are generous sales tax credits. I'd refer you to the work of the centre for public policy, a well-known left-of-centre think tank, about how this is not a tax grab. Even more interestingly, I'd refer him to the NDP candidate in the riding of Ottawa West, who, at a March 1 all-candidates debate, said, "Speaking of the HST, it makes sense on an international scale to do it for international trade in the long run. This will create jobs. It will cut taxes for families."

Try to get your facts straight. Try to tell the whole story, because when people see and understand the whole

story, they realize it's about lower taxes and more jobs, and that's what will guarantee Ontarians a much brighter future.

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. L'Ontario est une province inclusive qui accueille des gens des quatre coins du monde et de nombreuses minorités. La diversité est notre force. Les francophones, notamment, sont une minorité historique en Ontario.

Pouvez-vous nous dire, madame la Ministre, ce que le gouvernement fait pour les francophones?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci au député de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell pour sa question. Notre gouvernement, depuis notre arrivée au pouvoir, a fait énormément de progrès pour améliorer la vie des francophones.

On se souvient tous de la menace qui avait été faite par un gouvernement précédent de la fermeture de l'Hôpital Montfort. Le gouvernement Harris avait laissé des traces dans la communauté francophone.

Nous avons fait des investissements massifs en éducation afin de freiner le phénomène d'assimilation et de permettre à nos jeunes de travailler et de réussir leur carrière en français chez nous en Ontario. Depuis 2003, notre gouvernement a versé plus de 360 millions de dollars supplémentaires dans le système d'éducation en langue française. Au postsecondaire en français, nous avons augmenté le financement de 57 %. Nous avons fait aussi des investissements importants en matière d'immobilisations. Pensons à nos campus à Hearst, à Timmins—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Merci, madame la Ministre, de nous rassurer sur la position du gouvernement. On entend parfois des gens critiquer le bilinguisme en Ontario. Certains disent que cela ne devrait pas être une priorité ou que c'est un gaspillage d'argent. Un député de l'opposition officielle avait même dit, il y a deux ans, lors de la journée du drapeau franco-ontarien, que le drapeau franco-ontarien était une source de division en Ontario.

Pouvez-vous nous dire ce que vous répondez à ces critiques?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Oui. L'Ontario n'est pas officiellement bilingue, mais on sait qu'en 1986 il y avait une loi, la Loi sur les services en français, qui avait été adoptée à l'unanimité ici par les trois partis. Alors, le gouvernement a une responsabilité envers les 600 000 Ontariens dont le français est la langue d'usage.

J'étais très déçue ce matin d'entendre que la candidate conservatrice d'Ottawa West-Nepean ait eu une entrevue à CFRA où elle a dit ceci : « Bilingualism can be extremely expensive. I do not believe ... that bilingualism, at the moment, is a priority. » I'm very disappointed that the candidate in Ottawa West-Nepean—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I remind the members that we're not fighting election campaigns here.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Shurman: To the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry: There's a large difference between what McGuinty Liberals say and what they do.

Yesterday, I suggested Grant Forest Products could improve its bankruptcy proposal and keep jobs in Ontario if the Premier and his minister would immediately remove the red tape around the forestry fund that they created. The response of the Acting Premier and minister was insulting or even shameful to me, to Grant Forest Products and to the 1,500 employees who may soon lose their jobs. It was the usual dodge, that they don't want to interfere in matters before the courts.

Can the minister explain to northern Ontario families why Dalton McGuinty had the political will to intervene in the bankruptcy proceedings of Chrysler and GM in southern Ontario but won't lift a finger for a northern Ontario company?

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Hon. Michael Gravelle: We're working very, very closely with the forestry sector to provide incentives and supports in a number of ways.

The member does understand that Grant Forest Products is in CCAA and it is a court process. I appreciate he does not accept that, but that is indeed a fact.

The more important fact is that our government has been incredibly supportive in a number of ways. We've flowed over \$614 million to the forestry sector in the province of Ontario. That is an unprecedented amount of support that has come to the industry. It's helped keep mills open, it's helped reopen mills that were closed, and it's helping us through a very challenging situation right now. I can give you many, many examples of that. Certainly, we've provided \$205 million to our forest sector prosperity fund. The northern pulp and paper electricity rebate program, an extremely significant one that has given rebates back to the industry and the large pulp and paper companies, has been remarkably helpful in reducing their costs.

Indeed, we could not be more supportive. We'll continue to be supportive of the forestry—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Dalton McGuinty has been untruthful with the people of northern Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable—

Mr. Peter Shurman: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Mr. Peter Shurman: The proposal Grant Forest Products could put before the court would look very different if they had access to the loan guarantees that you created for this very purpose. The forest sector loan guarantee program still has \$307 million in it, but Grant Forest Products can't access it because of the red tape created by the McGuinty Liberals.

You say you care about northern Ontario families and jobs. Prove it today by granting a homegrown company the loan guarantees it requires to save 1,500 jobs.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The member is aware that with the sale of Grant Forest Products Englehart and Earlton facilities to Georgia-Pacific, they've guaranteed and committed they will keep the Englehart facility open. Our goal, indeed, is to maintain jobs in the forestry sector, and that will be the result.

The court monitor process is an important one. I know there is a consortium of northern business leaders that has put a proposal before the court monitor, and that will be considered, I'm sure, very seriously.

The fact is that we are committed to finding the best way we can to help the industry. That is why we've got a wood supply competition going forward that is going to put Ontario's wood to work. That is why we are getting a forest tenure review in place: because we believe there is a significantly improved way we can allocate, license and price our crown resources in the province. This is a huge commitment from our government, one that we are very much continuing to maintain—over \$614 million in investments—and certainly one that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Minister of Education: Niagara's school board is getting ready to shut down Crowland Central school. Crowland is a rural school, and its closure is going to leave a large area without service and force students to be bused into the urban area.

Will the minister intervene to protect Crowland, the rural community and the families and children who depend upon this school?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The honourable member knows that when it comes to decisions within our communities, we do have faith in our locally elected trustees. They are tasked with establishing accommodation review committees. Those committees are to engage people in the community to talk about the additional investments that we've been making with school boards and where best to stream those investments. We do have faith in the people in the communities who are tasked with this responsibility, and I think it would be totally inappropriate for anyone in government at this level to become involved in that. We have provided additional dollars to school boards in the face of declining enrolment, and we have faith in the decisions that are made locally.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: This is about the inadequacy of this government's funding of public schools. Let me tell you what Connie McCutcheon's got to say: "Crowland Central's more than a school ... it's a community hub that everyone in Cooks Mills relies on. When you don't have a Tim Hortons or grocery store, the school becomes

the central meeting place where everyone gets together. The school is the heart of our community.”

Why is this government going to facilitate the gutting of the historic and vibrant Cooks Mills/Crowland community? Why is it going to tear the heart out of that community?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's unfortunate that the honourable member would make those kinds of comments about the results of the hard work of people in the communities who have made decisions for the best interests of their students. I would also remind the honourable member about the responsibility that we have as government. That is to provide additional resources that are needed for programs and for students, and that is what we have done with the school board for Niagara.

I want to point out here for the members of the assembly that funding has increased for this school board. The honourable member might want to know that funding has increased since we've come to government by 21.7% in the face of declining enrolment of 12.5%. The work that we do with school boards, we recognize that they continue to play an important role—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Ontario's child care system faces the loss of over \$63.5 million in federal government funding, which is running out this month. Without a new commitment from the federal government, many families who depend on much-needed subsidies will be seriously affected. Working families depend on affordable child care. That's why our government stepped in with a provincial investment of \$18 million to provide stability and stretch the subsidies through the end of the 2009-10 school year and into the summer.

The cancellation of the federal agreement will affect approximately 8,000 children across the province and over 2,000 in the city of Toronto. The highest-needs neighbourhoods will be the most affected, including my riding of York South-Weston. Can the minister please share with this House—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member for her advocacy on this important issue on behalf of her community. I, too, share concern about and disappointment with the fact that the federal government has cancelled the historic early learning and child care agreement, which our government entered into in 2005 on behalf of the families of Ontario. The child care agreement cancellation resulted in the loss of \$1.4 billion over three years for Ontario's families.

On behalf of the thousands and thousands of Ontario families and children, I call upon the federal government to redress this issue when they have an opportunity to do

so this week as they talk about the jobs of the future in their throne speech today, and to recognize that, for Ontario's kids to be ready for those jobs of the future, we need to give them the quality child care they deserve here in Ontario today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The potential loss of child care spaces for low-income families is of great concern to parents, local organizations and child care providers. They look to us to take an active role in calling on the federal government to do its part.

Parents in my riding welcome the move towards full-day early learning and understand that continued support for child care is essential to the success of full-day learning, as it will provide a continuum of services for families and communities across Ontario. However, there have been some concerns about the potential effect it may have on existing child care programs, from changes to the age groups of children accessing child care to the potential impacts on staffing.

Could the minister please explain what our government is planning to do to minimize the impact to existing child care programs and ensure that we can maintain and enhance child care services across the province?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Bringing forward the vision of Charles Pascal into our province is an exciting opportunity for Ontario's kids, to make sure that our earliest learners are given the educational foundation they need to succeed tomorrow. We know that this historic change is one that we need to work on closely, and have been working closely, with child care operators across the province, with the College of ECE and with municipal service providers to find the answers to transition to this important new world, where Ontario's children begin learning at the earliest stage of entering into child care, early in the morning, and that continues late into the afternoon, when they might be getting homework help from their child care provider.

We continue to work closely with our partners to bring this important initiative to fruition and we continue to call upon the federal government to also be a partner in delivering on education for Ontario's very earliest learners and those who will take the jobs tomorrow.

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ELECTRICAL GENERATING STATION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Yesterday, I asked you to justify your decision to put a gas-fired power plant in the middle of an Oakville community. You brushed off my question and the health and safety concerns of Oakville residents.

At the same time, by the hundreds, these residents rallied together at Queen's Park, demanding clean air and a safe community to live in. You said that you will listen to the people of Oakville. The question remains: Did you hear the people of Oakville?

Minister, the people of Oakville want an individual environmental assessment. Will you give it to them?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I was pleased to answer the question yesterday and I'm pleased to answer it again today. Of course we'll listen to the people of Oakville. Yesterday, I indicated—and I will today as well—that the MPP from that area, Kevin Flynn, is doing an incredible job. He's bringing the voice of his community to this chamber. He's bringing the voice of the community to me. I met with him. Mayor Burton—I've had conversations with him as well.

It's very important that we pay respect to the people of Oakville and that we listen to their concerns. We will ensure that we do everything we can to address each and every one of the concerns that are raised with regard to this. We take their concerns seriously and we'll continue to listen; we'll continue to work with them.

There is a need for power in that part of the greater Toronto area; that cannot be denied. We're not going to do what they did when they were in office and ignore the realities of the need to build power. We're going to take tough decisions sometimes today to ensure that we have power—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'll take it that you did not hear the people of Oakville or that they don't want that power plant—and it sounds to me like you're going ahead with it.

It was ironic when the minister mentioned dirty coal yesterday, since his government has repeatedly broken its promise to shut down coal-fired power plants. He went on to say that we need to diversify our energy supply, but he ignored the health and safety concerns that must be attached to any power energy plan.

Minister, why on earth are you putting a power plant in an area with poor air quality, and beside Ontario homes, schools, daycare centres and seniors' residences? Why are you doing that, Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: One of the things that our government has to deal with is the party opposite's love affair with coal and the fact that all through their years in office, they continued to rely on dirty coal as their source for energy.

The people of Ontario expect better of their leaders than that. The people of Ontario care about the health and safety of their children and their grandchildren. They know that we have to plan ahead. They know that we have a responsibility to clean up our air and our environment, a responsibility to do what we can to deal with global warming. That is precisely why we've taken tough decisions today to move away from coal. As we speak today, we have the lowest level of coal emissions in this province that we've had for 43 years. We're proud of that.

We've had to take some tough decisions to replace coal. By 2014, we're determined to ensure that coal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. The Liberal candidate in Leeds–Grenville—Speaker, this is a legitimate question to the Minister of Health; it is.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. As I have reminded in previous by-elections, we do not need to be fighting the by-elections here. If you want to ask a general question about an issue in a municipality—

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Finance—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just say to the honourable member from Renfrew, please don't be argumentative. I took the government member to task as well on this.

Ask a general question. Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Liberals in Leeds–Grenville say that they're going to fix local health care problems by bringing the health minister to that riding within 100 days if they elect their candidate. It's not a bad idea, but in the event that the Liberals aren't victorious in Leeds–Grenville, will the health minister still commit to visiting Brockville to discuss her health care cuts with the people there within 100 days of that by-election?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can tell you that one of the most rewarding parts of my job is travelling throughout this province and meeting people who are on the front lines, meeting the workers who make our health care system as terrific as it is. It is absolutely the most rewarding part of my job. It's where I learn from people who are actually on the front lines. I look forward to travelling throughout the province, and wherever I have the opportunity to go, I welcome that opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think that the Liberals in Leeds–Grenville really are on to something, and I agree wholeheartedly that the Minister of Health should be visiting that riding; she should be visiting Brockville. She should be visiting Brockville to talk directly to health care workers who have been laid off and told not to return to work.

Whether she visits or not, will she at least commit today to putting a moratorium on the cuts to health care jobs in that community that have left local residents extremely worried?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are committed to improving the quality of health care in this province. Our track record is as strong as a track record can be. We have made tremendous progress in rebuilding the foundation that was left in a crumbled condition when we took office six years ago. Those investments are showing the results and we are now in a position where we have built a stronger foundation. Now what we have to do is work toward creating a sustainable health care system that will be there for generations to come.

We do have to look at ways to offer care in different settings. We have to reorganize how we deliver health

care. It's hard work. One option would be just to cut spending altogether; one option would be to just do more of the same. We're taking a different approach. We're going to be doing things—we are doing things—differently in health care. We're really focusing on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is also for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Recently, we have heard that there has been an increase over the past few years in the number of patients receiving health care services outside of Ontario, services that are paid for under OHIP. There is no doubt that this is sometimes necessary for special procedures or analysis. When a new and innovative approach is discovered elsewhere, it can help Ontarians. However, I think we all share a desire to limit these occurrences and keep as much care as possible in the province.

Some have linked the increase in services provided outside of Ontario to funding challenges faced by our hospitals. Can the minister please address out-of-country services and how the government plans to decrease the amount spent on these services outside of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First, let me thank the member for his question. I want to say that our government is committed to providing the best quality health care for people in Ontario, within Ontario, whenever possible.

We have seen an increase in out-of-country services. Over half of the volume of out-of-country is actually due to genetic testing. In that case, of course, it is the specimen, not the patient, that is leaving the province.

We're working on a number of initiatives that will reduce the number of services that are delivered out of province. We're bringing them back home. We're working on a plan to repatriate the five most common genetic tests. We expect these services to be up and running in the next few months. That will significantly reduce the number we have to send outside the province.

We're investing \$75 million in bariatric surgery right here in Ontario. We're creating centres of excellence around the province for these—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: This issue requires action, and I look forward to hearing from the minister about progress being made.

It seems one of the key indicators of how our health care system is working is how long people are waiting to get service. It's also one of the reasons people would need to go outside of Ontario. In a single-payer system like we have in Canada, it's crucial that we take action to reduce wait times so that people can get access to the health care services they need when they need them and where they need them.

Can the minister please tell this House the status of the government's wait times strategy and how this is impacting residents in my community of Ottawa Centre?
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Hon. Deborah Matthews: Wait times are clearly a key priority for this government. For the first time, we're measuring wait times; we're reporting publicly on wait times. And wait times are coming down in every one of the areas where we are reporting on them.

The Fraser Institute reports that Ontario has the lowest wait times in Canada. We're the only province that gets straight As from the Wait Time Alliance for meeting the targets across all five types of surgery: hip, knee, cancer, cardiac and cataract.

In the Champlain LHIN, which includes the member's riding, we've had tremendously significant results: cataract surgery down by 212 days, hip replacement down by 102 days, and knee replacement down by 273 days. We're making the necessary investments to bring down wait times for MRIs. We added a new MRI at the Ottawa Hospital in January of last year and another is coming to Montfort. Together, these will increase the number—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In December 2008, you announced that you would adopt my private member's bill to prevent the clawback of Ontario disability support program payments for people who set up a registered disability savings plan.

Minister, why are families being told that RDSP contributions will be clawed back from the ODSP payment?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: C'est une excellente question. This is an excellent question. I wanted to say that this government is very proud to support the RDSP as a way to help families with children and adults with disabilities, and to help people with disabilities plan for their future needs. No, we are not going to claw back the help that we are already providing to these people. It's part of their income and it's put there for a good reason. We're very pleased to support this benefit, and I encourage all people who have someone in their family with a disability to take advantage of the RDSP.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Minister, thank you for clearing up the confusion, but the reality is my office has been fielding phone calls from concerned families because they are being told by ODSP regional offices that, in fact, they will be clawed back if they set up an RDSP.

Will you commit today to notifying staff and families across the province of the RDSP program and that their ODSP payments will not be affected?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I will. I will make sure that all our offices know about it. But sometimes people are confused because there is a limit for people who are on OW or ODSP. On OW, they can receive gifts

in the form of payments of up to \$6,000 a year. So they may be confused about that. I'll make sure that we send a note to every office to clarify that. Thank you for asking the question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. This government speaks a great deal about its investments in public transit, but the reality on the ground is that transit is becoming less and less affordable for Ontarians. Transit fares are increasing faster than inflation right across the province. The situation in Ottawa is particularly dire. This week, Ottawa transit users are dealing with another 7.5% increase in fares, only eight months after a 15% increase in the price of bus tickets. Ottawa transit fares of \$3.25 a ride are among the most expensive in all of North America.

Why is the McGuinty government standing by as transit becomes less affordable in Ottawa and right across the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think it's quite clear, if you look at our record in terms of investments in public transit, that we are very, very committed to increasing the ridership across the province. First of all, if you look at the gas tax, two cents of the gas tax that has been allocated across the province is dedicated to increasing transit ridership.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Seven years in a row.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Exactly. We've been doing that seven years in a row. A hundred and eighteen communities in the province, 92 transit systems, are the beneficiaries of that money. We've invested more than \$8.9 billion in public transit, including \$3.7 billion in GO Transit and \$11.5 billion for MoveOntario 2020, which is the largest transit investment in Ontario's history.

I know that the member opposite is engaged in a political process vis-à-vis a by-election that's going on in the Ottawa region right now, but I think you have to look objectively—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Like most Ontario municipalities, the city of Ottawa uses the province's gas tax transfer to cover capital necessary to provide public transit to a growing population. The gas tax transfer does not help deal with the rising cost of fuel and other operating costs. When the operating of transit is underfunded, people drive more, increasing greenhouse gases, and low-income transit users can't afford the fares.

Why won't the McGuinty government commit to a return to funding 50% of operating subsidies to ensure that transit is affordable in Ottawa and right across Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows perfectly well that the gas tax money can be used for operating expenses—she knows that—and she knows that there are thresholds above which the municipalities can use that money for operations.

We're looking forward to Ottawa's detailed plan for transit. We've earmarked \$200 million for rapid-transit funding. We're working with the city to improve public transit. Almost \$500 million, since 2003, has gone to the city of Ottawa. That includes \$155 million in gas tax, \$37 million in gas tax just this year, and \$54 million to repair or upgrade 274 buses.

I think if you look objectively at what we have done—gas tax plus the other funding increases and contributions that we've made to public transit—it is very, very clear that we are committed to public transit in Ottawa and across the province.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Consumer Services. This past weekend, Toronto experienced quite the snowstorm. In my own riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, we've been under snow since New Year's. A number of my constituents are turning their minds to travelling south to get away from the snow shovels and the snow blowers, but then we heard the story about a travel provider that had gone out of business and had left their clients not only without the trip but, in some cases, without their money as well.

So my question to the minister is: Please, could the minister tell the House what the government is doing to ensure that consumers are protected when they plan trips away and outside the province?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: I would like to thank the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex for that question. She is a great advocate when it comes to consumer protection in her riding.

I highly recommend that when Ontarians are choosing a travel agency or a travel website, they ensure that they're registered with TICO, the Travel Industry Council of Ontario. With TICO, Ontarians are protected with something that's called the Ontario travel industry compensation fund. Ontario is one of only three jurisdictions in Canada that have this compensation fund. There are over 2,400 registrants with TICO that provide travel services, and I would encourage that all Ontarians make sure the TICO logo is on their site.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you very much, Minister. I really do appreciate the fact that it's important for people to register with a TICO-registered travel provider, but I guess the question I really want to know is, in this case, how do we inform our consumers about TICO, and what other things should they be looking for when they are travelling and booking with travel agents?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: As the Minister of Consumer Services, I'm happy to advise the member that my ministry is doing a great job when it comes to telling Ontarians how to protect their travel investments.

Some of the things that we've done—in fact, just on February 18, I was out at the travel information centre at Yonge and Dundas here in Toronto to talk about some tips when you're purchasing a vacation.

Five of the smart tips include: (1) choose your travel agent carefully; (2) ask questions and research your destination; (3) ask about non-refundable fees; (4) get health insurance if you're travelling out of province; and (5) get it in writing and check your receipt.

The other thing that I would highly recommend is, if you are going to be travelling, please visit our website: ontario.ca/consumerservices.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, you're aware of the energy-from-waste project in my riding of Durham. In fact, I've met with you on this and asked for you to monitor it very closely; as you know, my constituents are quite concerned that public health may be at risk. Dr. Jefferson and Wendy Bracken, as well as Linda Gasser, who are constituents of mine, convened a meeting last night in the riding. They are suggesting that only a handful of pollutants will be monitored as part of this project.

Minister, can you assure my constituents and all of the people in my riding of Durham that this project will have the highest and best standards, that they will be monitored and reported publicly and, more importantly, that the penalties for exceedance will be severe?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to thank the member for the question, because I know it's a big issue in that part of Durham. As the member well knows, the ministry has done a review. It has been posted on the EBR. The comment period goes from February 26 to April 2. At that point in time, we will be considering all the comments that have been received to make sure that the right decision is made in the long run.

We want to make sure that it not only meets but passes the tough air emissions standards that we currently have in the province of Ontario—and the member may recall that we have upgraded about 57 of these standards in the last four years. We want to make sure that this facility meets all of those tough standards before it will ever be approved.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Minister, and again, let's put public safety first, not the politics. What we need here is a clear commitment by you that there will not only be the standards but the enforcement provisions, as well as the penalties. We're concerned that the proposed proponent operator has been under some charges in the United States. Are you aware of the proponent's record in the past to make sure that we have the best and safest operation in my riding of Durham for the province of Ontario?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As the member well knows, from the Ministry of the Environment's viewpoint and from the government's viewpoint, air quality standards and high water quality standards are an absolute essential of this government's mandate. We want to make sure that these kinds of standards will be met in this kind of facility, and you can be assured that all comments will be taken into account before a final decision is made.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to correct the record. In my answer to the member from Parkdale–High Park I noted that our government had earmarked \$200 million for rapid-transit funding in Ottawa. In fact, that was the initial commitment. We've actually committed \$600 million to Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

OLYMPIC ATHLETES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The Olympic cauldron has been extinguished and the flame transferred to Russia in preparation for 2014, but I would be remiss to not stand and share with the House what an experience the 2010 Vancouver Olympics has been. From the first gold of Alex Bilodeau to the final gold, Sunday night in men's hockey, we truly were blessed to host a great Olympics, a games where Canada earned 14 golds—a record for any country in the winter games.

I'm proud of the many athletes from across Canada and Ontario who worked so hard to compete. As a proud aunt of one of those Olympians, I've seen the sacrifice and commitment of these young athletes, who give up a great deal to have the opportunity to compete under a Canadian flag on Canadian soil—or should I say, ice and snow. We all enjoyed the past 17 days of events, watching our athletes achieve medals and personal bests, but keep in mind the many years of preparation that went into those performances.

To the athletes who represented us so well, thank you. Thank you for your commitment to your sport. Thank you for showing us all what amazing individuals we have representing us every year at the nationals, the world cups and ultimately, the Olympics, and thank you for being such wonderful ambassadors for healthy living and showing us how to set and achieve goals.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Bill Mauro: About nine months ago in Ontario, we announced the amalgamation of about 20 isolate boards in our province. In my riding, in Atikokan, the former Atikokan Catholic board, which was responsible for St. Patrick's School, has now been joined with the Northwest Catholic District School Board. These mergers are important. They will ensure that resources and programs offered by the larger boards will have an opportunity to flow down to some of the smaller boards.

Since the announcement, we've been working on ensuring that proper and appropriate representation is afforded to the people of Atikokan, and I'm pleased that

with the support of the former Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, and the current Minister of Education, Leona Dombrowsky, we've now ensured that Atikokan is going to have a voice at the table. Through Bill 177 and with the support of those ministers; Anne-Marie Fitzgerald, the chair of the board; Mary-Catherine Kelly, the director; and through exercising the legislative authority that is vested with the minister, we've ensured that this particular board will see its number of trustees go from seven up to eight. So we're very pleased with that.

I've had discussions with the chair of the board, the director and the other trustees. We're hoping that the board will continue with what has been its historical practice of electing trustees by geography, so that we can ensure the people of Atikokan will have not only an additional trustee on the board but a trustee who is dedicated to and responsible for the interests of the people of Atikokan.

I want to thank the ministers, the chair and the director once again.

SCHOOL IN CAMBODIA

Mr. Norm Miller: On February 18, the Muskoka School opened in the Siem Reap district of Cambodia, thanks to the tireless efforts of Lisa McCoy of Gravenhurst. With the help of and fundraising by the Rotary Clubs of Muskoka, the Ontario-based Cambodia Landmine Museum Relief Fund, the Trailblazer Foundation and generous contributions by the people of Muskoka, over \$20,000 was raised. This money allowed 400 Cambodian children to have the opportunity to continue their education in a brand new school.

The inauguration of the school was met with much excitement and Muskoka was thanked for its generous contributions, which not only went to the construction of the school but also provided over \$2,000 for 400 new school uniforms and sandals. Over the past few months, Lisa McCoy has also distributed over 140 bicycles, which were purchased with the help of the Rotary Club of Bracebridge-Muskoka Lakes and the Rotary Club of Orillia. These bikes represent access to an education for the children of the rural villages of Cambodia.

Education is the key to unlocking hope and prosperity, and for generations to come, the children of Cambodia will benefit from the inspirational efforts of Lisa McCoy.

I want to also extend my sincere appreciation to the many Muskoka residents who volunteered their talents and time to make the Muskoka School in Cambodia a reality.

MADEIRA

Mr. Charles Sousa: A tragic natural disaster has recently befallen the Portuguese island of Madeira. Madeira is known for its exotic foods, beautiful vacations and its world-renowned Madeira wine. Unfortunately, this beautiful island situated off the African coast was

struck by torrential storms and a devastating series of flash floods on February 21.

The devastation brought about deadly mudslides, destroyed homes, claimed lives and threw the island into a state of crisis. The death toll is rising, and many people are still missing. As a Portuguese Canadian, I am deeply distraught by this terrible tragedy. My thoughts are with the people of Madeira, as well as their friends and family.

Yet, in the wake of this catastrophe, the display of solidarity and resolve among the Portuguese-Ontarian community has been inspirational. In particular, I would like to recognize the tremendous efforts of Mr. Frank Alvarez, president of CIRV Radio and Festival Portuguese Television, who, together with many volunteers, hosted a full-day radio telethon and raised over \$225,000.

As with other extraordinary efforts that support victims around the world, the people of Ontario and Canada do not idly sit by when disaster strikes abroad. Authorities say it will take a decade for Madeira to recover and an estimated 1.4 billion euros to rebuild the island.

This once pristine island faces a daunting challenge, one that must be met with perseverance, courage and co-operation. The people of Madeira are suffering, and they need our help.

Valiant efforts are ongoing to raise money and collect essential materials to help rebuild the lives of those who survived the aftermath of this tragedy.

I commend the hard work of Ontario's Portuguese community, as well as others who have devoted their time and money to this important humanitarian cause.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to pay tribute today to citizens from the township of Scugog who have received the Ontario Heritage Trust volunteer recognition award.

Brandon and Janna Guido were recognized for built heritage as a result of their meticulous restoration of the former Crandell home.

The Prince Albert school 50th anniversary committee was recognized for cultural heritage.

The 41 Port Perry Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps was recognized in the category of youth volunteers in cultural heritage. The cadets had chosen the Dr. Herbert Bruce tartan for their new pipe and drum band. Dr. Herbert was born in Scugog in 1868. He was the founder of the Wellesley Hospital in Toronto and was the 15th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

Joyce Kelly received a lifetime volunteer recognition award from the Ontario Heritage Trust. She has made an outstanding contribution to the success of agricultural fairs in my riding and indeed throughout Ontario.

Congratulations to everyone who works to preserve heritage in Durham and throughout Ontario, and a special thanks to the mayor and the council for Scugog for recommending these worthy recipients.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also recognize that today was the greenbelt's fifth anniversary celebration with Friends of the Greenbelt. There was an awards presentation at the Royal Ontario Museum, which I was unable to attend, but my colleague did attend and informed me that the Honourable David Peterson, former Premier of Ontario, presented to Eric and Jennifer Bowman from Gallery on the Farm an award from Friends of the Greenbelt. They were recommended by the Durham region economic development and tourism department, as well as the Durham agricultural advisory committee. They're well-respected and worthy recipients of this esteemed recognition.

NAGARATNAM SIVALINGAM

Mr. David Caplan: Yesterday morning, I learned with some sadness of the passing of Nagaratnam Sivalingam. For those of us lucky enough to know Siva, we know he was a simple but humble human being, a man who was honest, fair and always determined and motivated to do the right thing day in and day out.

Siva was a transformative force in Canada's Tamil community. He arrived in Canada at the age of 25 and, over the course of 45 years in this country, he built one institution after another. Most of them stand tall today as the servants of our community.

It is difficult to sum up all of his accomplishments in a few sentences, but I'd like to take the opportunity to mention a few of his many achievements.

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Siva was the founding president of the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada, which is an advocacy agency turned social service agency serving our community for over 30 years now.

Siva was also a founding trustee of the Hindu Temple Society of Canada, the largest Saiva temple in North America.

In between building these institutions, I can proudly say that he was a true Canadian who believed in the Canadian values of democracy, transparency, peace and justice.

He was engaged at every level of civil society. He took his citizen responsibilities to heart. He would not simply vote in every election; rather, he would sit with his fellow community members in seemingly endless meetings in order to understand the issues from various points of view.

I'm sad to see my friend go, but I'm inspired by the life that he lived so well.

Our condolences go out to his wife, Jegajenany, and daughters, Sivajini and Harini, grandchildren, siblings and extended friends and family.

May his soul rest in peace.

PROROGATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Before I start my statement, I just want to say that I am so pleased that talks are taking

place between Vale Inco and Local 6500 of USW. They have been on strike for eight long months. This is way too long. Let's hope that a resolution can be found.

Today I want to speak about the McGuinty government following Mr. Harper's lead to prorogue this House, an action that will kill important bills and erase a lot of work of a lot of MPPs. Prorogation, for example, will kill my private member's bill, Bill 156, the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act, which received second reading in this House. That bill would force large restaurant chains to list calories on their menus and menu boards so that the epidemic of child obesity can be worked on. Prorogation will also kill another of my bills, Bill 229, the Day Nurseries Amendment Act, which would ensure that children in daycare are provided adequate protection from the sun.

It will also kill bills from the Liberal side, like Bill 83, An Act to help prevent skin cancer, which would ban children from tanning salons to decrease cancer risks among our young people.

Prorogation will also kill Bill 89, the Ombudsman Amendment Act, which would allow Ombudsman oversight of hospitals in order to make sure that patient concerns are being addressed.

Prorogation erases the hard work of individual MPPs. It is disappointing.

RIDING OF HALIBURTON-KAWARTHA LAKES-BROCK

Mr. Rick Johnson: I know you may find this hard to believe, but this Friday marks the first anniversary of my election to the Ontario Legislature. It has been a busy and rewarding year and an honour to serve the people of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. Over the past year, I've had the pleasure of meeting many people throughout the riding and attending a variety of spectacular events.

As we enter the spring and summer tourism season, I would encourage you and your constituents to join me in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for outstanding entertainment, exciting festivals and magnificent hospitality.

Included among the many events in my region are the 4th Line summer theatre season in Millbrook, the Lindsay Country Jamboree, the Buckhorn Fine Art Festival, the Haliburton Sportsmen's Show, the Canadian Power Sports Festival, the Coe Hill Wild West Weekend, Fiesta Buckhorn, the Haliburton Highland Games, the Lindsay Lilac Festival, and countless county and agricultural fairs, including, of course, the Kinmount Fair and the Lindsay Fair.

In addition to the many events we have to offer, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock is blessed with spectacular scenery and abundant natural beauty. We have crystal-clear lakes, pristine forests, miles of marked wilderness trails and several provincial parks.

You don't need to venture far from home this year for a great holiday or a quick getaway. Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has it all: cultural events, festivals, resorts,

cottages, outdoor and natural activities. There's something for everyone. I encourage all Ontarians to visit us this year and experience the great hospitality of the region I am proud and honoured to represent.

DIGITAL MEDIA

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Over the last couple of weeks, students and staff from Sheridan College in Oakville have been doing this province proud and receiving quite a bit of attention from tourists in Vancouver. It's been great news for our province as Sheridan staff, students and partners were in Vancouver to promote Ontario as a great tourist destination and to demonstrate Ontario's leadership in digital media innovation.

Late last year, Sheridan College was approached by our Ministry of Tourism to develop a 3D game for the Vancouver Olympics. In under 12 weeks and on budget, Sheridan, along with partners Spatial View and Research in Motion, created the world's first real-time auto-stereoscopic 3D game that does not require 3D glasses. The game allowed tourists who visited Ontario House pavilion to piece together 3D puzzles that depicted 20 of our tourism hotspots, using BlackBerry phones. The school is partnering with McMaster University, Atomic Energy of Canada and the great municipality of Ottawa to develop similar projects.

I'd like to congratulate the people involved in the project, specifically Sheridan College. Once again, they've demonstrated leadership in developing world-class digital media.

I want to thank them for their efforts in promoting Ontario as a great place to visit. I want to thank them as the member of provincial Parliament for Oakville. I'm really proud to represent a community that's got such a wonderful institution within its borders.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Standing order 63(a) provides that "the Standing Committee on Estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 60 and 62 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year."

The House not having received a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates for certain offices on Thursday, November 19, 2009, as required by the standing orders of this House, pursuant to standing order 63(b), the estimates before the committee of the Office of the Assembly, the Office of the Auditor General, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer and Ombudsman Ontario are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Pursuant to standing order 61(b), the 2009-10 estimates of these offices not having been selected for consideration are deemed to be received and concurred in.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 248, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 / Projet de loi 248, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The intent of this bill is to protect unionized workers from having work moved out of unionized units into non-union units, focused primarily on protection of media in this province.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to rise and read yet again another petition from my riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy" and use "every day. A few examples include: coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the" dreaded "health tax, which costs upwards of ... \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on ... hard-working families and businesses."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Max, one of the young pages here.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled "Ontario Must Address Child Care"—hundreds of thousands of signatures from Windsor CAW child care services. It reads as follows:

"We are urging the provincial government to commit to base funding for child care providers to support operations and wages and commit to saving the current number of child care spaces for ages zero to three.

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"We call on Premier McGuinty and Finance Minister Dwight Duncan to:

"(1) Ensure the province provides sufficient funding to maintain existing levels of child care service and recognize cost-of-living and other legitimate increases in operating costs.

"(2) Provide all necessary tools to support the transition to an early learning program, including base funding for child care programs to support operations and wages comparable to the full-day learning program, in order to ensure that the child care system remains stable and sustainable."

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and send it to the table via page Colin.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Espanola in the riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients ...; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine";

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: "to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks with page Jordan.

TAXATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people in Nickel Belt, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario has lost 171,000 jobs since October and over 300,000 manufacturing and resource sector jobs since 2004; and

"Whereas many families are facing the threat of layoffs or reduced hours; and

"Whereas, rather than introducing a plan to sustain jobs and put Ontario's economy back on track, Dalton McGuinty and his government chose to slap an 8% tax on everyday purchases while giving profitable corporations a \$2-billion income tax cut";

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: They "call on the Legislature to cancel the scheduled implementation of sales tax harmonization."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks with page Christopher.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has taken an important step in its decision to implement full-day kindergarten; and

"Whereas children between the ages of six and 12 years continue to suffer from a lack of accessible, quality programs; and

"Whereas unlike youth and children in their early years, more than one million children six to 12 years old across Ontario are being left behind because of a lack of dedicated funding for accessible, quality middle-childhood programs; and

"Whereas failure to increase middle childhood programming threatens a child's safety, education and social development as they prepare to face the challenges of the approaching teen years; and

"Whereas implementing effective middle-childhood programs increases self-esteem, improves school performance and enhances quality of life for both children and their families; and

"Whereas Charles Pascal, in his 2009 report With Our Best Future in Mind, provides a framework and strategy for implementing a provincial structure for middle childhood programs across Ontario; and

"Whereas investing in middle childhood programs is part of Ontario's economic stimulus strategy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest now in children six to 12 years old across Ontario and implement the recommendations made in the With Our Best Future in Mind report."

I agree with this petition, I affix my signature and I submit it with page Ava.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PENSION BENEFITS
AMENDMENT ACT, 2010LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 236, An Act to

amend the Pension Benefits Act / Projet de loi 236, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much for letting me continue the debate on this very important issue we were talking about, the pension reform bill. I took some time the last time I was speaking on this issue to talk about the importance of pension reform in the province of Ontario and the kinds of things we need to do in order to make sure that, as we are getting through this economy, we have a viable pension system. And not only a pension system, but I think we need to put more focus on retirement incomes, because that's where we're heading, to make sure that those who do not have a defined pension plan are still able to have retirement income. I talked about my circumstances as somebody who has never had a pension. The focus is on retirement income and how necessary it is that we engage in some sort of a national summit, as the Premier has called for and as has been endorsed by the Council of the Federation. We need to make sure that nationally, collectively, we're sitting down and talking about the issues around retirement income.

One of the other things—and this is where I stopped, I believe, last time when I was speaking on this issue a few days ago—is the issue around Nortel pensioners and Nortel pensions. As I had mentioned, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, there are a lot of Nortel pensioners. I've been engaged with them since last year trying to work through some of the ins and outs around Nortel pensions, both at the federal level, because there are some issues around bankruptcy and insolvency legislation federally, but also at the provincial level. I've had numerous meetings with people like Don Sproule, who is actually heading the Nortel pensioners group with Rob Paterson, who lives in my riding, and with David Jeanes as well, who has been very instructive to me on this particular issue. Over these numerous meetings, we've talked about things like the pension benefits guarantee fund, PBGF, a very valid issue around the windup of Nortel pensions, if it comes down to that.

On the issue of PBGF, I had the opportunity to write to the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, on July 14, 2009, when I urged him that the government look at its responsibility of ensuring the funding of PBGF so that Nortel pensioners, if they need a top-up of up to \$1,000, that money is available. I was very pleased to see, just in February, the minister making the announcement that the government will be putting aside money to allow for that top-up of up to \$1,000 for Nortel pensioners. That is good news for Nortel pensioners in my riding of Ottawa Centre. I have made sure they know that that commitment has been made as well.

Now the bigger issue which the Nortel pensioners are concerned about is around the windup. I just wanted to go through some of the submissions they have made to ensure that it is on the record in this Legislature as to what Nortel pensioners are looking for in terms of ensuring that their pensions are protected in some way.

The Nortel Retirees and former employees Protection Canada, which is an umbrella group created to deal with this particular issue, have written to me, and I'm sure they've written to other MPPs as well, to talk about some of the issues. Essentially, what they're looking for is a fiscally responsible win-win for the province of Ontario and for the group of 17,500 Nortel pensioners which they represent.

What they're looking for is—and I'll endeavour to summarize. They have articulated an orphanage concept which is based on the following principles:

- that pension plans continue with initial benefits at a supportable level;

- that PBGF supplements Ontario benefits on a monthly basis—that's something I talked about earlier, and it's already taken care of;

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- funds asset allocation consistent with a conservative investment profile;

- benefits adjusted biannually based on investment program returns;

- government assures that minimum benefits are not less than conventional windup—any surplus above original plan benefits absorbed by PBGF;

- Nortel estate settlement integrated to improve benefits when claims materialize; and

- PBGF benefits could be combined with the estate claim and other government support to annuitized pensions so it's beneficial to all parties.

Essentially, an orphanage concept has an impact on pensions approximately half of windup; a biannual pension adjustment is dependent on fund investment success, its participation in improved PBGF benefits, and if fund equities have time to recover from a market slump.

According to the Nortel pensioners on this particular proposal, they estimate that in a conventional windup, the PBGF estimates an immediate impact of about a \$277-million payout to the pensioners. In an orphanage concept, according to the pensioners' group, there is no immediate infusion of \$277 million of PBGF funding. According to them, PBGF supplements are much smaller and payments are spread over multiple budgets. There's about a \$1-million to \$2-million contribution per month, decreasing as participants decline. As such, they argue that there's minimal societal and economic impact caused. There's a slight risk that fund investment will not support minimum benefits long-term. There's improved public confidence in a provincial retirement income system. That will allow, according to them, a phase-in of full Arthurs report benefits. So, less costly with minimal risk is what they're talking about.

That's the submission they have made. Essentially, they argue that winding up defined benefit pension plans is punitive under prevailing market conditions because we know what has happened with the market and where those pension plans sit right now. The orphanage proposal represents an alternative to offset these future

financial losses with minimal risk. It's a win-win for both pensioners and the province.

I have been learning from the Nortel retirees in my riding. I've advocated to the Minister of Finance to look at this proposal, to engage in a dialogue—as I understand, the minister is engaged in a dialogue with Nortel pensioners—and to give due consideration to the Nortel proposal around orphanage.

There is another issue that I want to discuss—just mindful of time—which is an important issue. That is an issue which is slightly different from this particular issue around Nortel pensioners and the pension plan, and that is the benefits for Nortel pensioners with a long-term disability. It's a different issue. It's a different class of people who will be impacted. Again, I've been engaged with a constituent of mine, Sylvain de Margerie, who has been very good and instructive to me on that issue. On November 6, 2009, I wrote to the Minister of Finance on the issue around LTD benefits and how they are different. The key difference for LTD benefits is that they're not insured, which makes them even more vulnerable to the current situation and climate. It's important that the Minister of Finance look at LTD benefits and the impact on beneficiaries separately, because they really impact people who have long-term disabilities and need the support necessary.

These are some very important issues, I think, in the current economic climate that we need to really pay attention to. This particular legislation, which amends—or “reforms” probably is the better word—the Pension Benefits Act, is an important first step. I think the minister has indicated that there will be more legislation coming out in the spring—after, I'm assuming, the budget—which will speak to some of the other recommendations that are made in the Arthurs report. But in today's economic climate, it is extremely important that we do consider the issue around pensions. Most importantly, I again assert that we need to look at the broad issue around retirement income. That is a very important issue, because there are a lot of Ontarians—in fact, there is a majority of Canadians—who do not have a defined pension plan, and they still have to determine where their retirement income will come from. That's why I think a national dialogue on that very important issue, as we define our destiny for the 21st century, is extremely important.

Thank you very much for the time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The member for Ottawa Centre has offered some interesting points this afternoon with respect to this debate on Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act. Like him, I have met with constituents who are retirees from Nortel. Actually, on Monday of this week, I met with Ron Lovegrow, Harry Durham and Jim Delaat in Georgetown. They gave me information about the proposed Ontario pension plan orphanage that the member for Ottawa Centre made reference to in his comments at some length.

I would just like to add my voice to the suggestion that the Minister of Finance should seriously and carefully evaluate the suggestion that's being made. Certainly, the Nortel pensioners have very serious concerns about their retirement security, and having listened to what has been happening with their particular circumstances, I certainly empathize with them and would hope that this solution might be something that the government could seriously consider, as I've said, and adopt.

The orphanage concept is based on a great deal of research. They contend that the risks are manageable; individual and societal costs are reduced. Benefits could be guaranteed at conventional windup plus upside potential, and they suggest that the impact for the province would potentially be less costly under their proposal than the other way of going about it.

I note that the government of Ontario made a commitment to Nortel pensioners with respect to the pension benefits guarantee fund recently in February, just last month. I'm not sure if it had anything to do with the pending by-election which takes place on Thursday in Ottawa; I suspect there might have been some connection. Maybe the member for Ottawa Centre would further enlighten us on that. But the fact is, we do need to stand with these pensioners who are in this situation and do what we can as a provincial government to support them.

Again, I would strongly encourage the government to look at this particular orphanage proposal.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Let's face it, folks: Only 35% of Ontarians have an occupational pension plan. I'm part of the boomer generation. We in this House don't have a pension plan. Most of us are going to retire and we're going to be completely dependent on our RSPs. Quite frankly, my eyes glaze over at this stuff. I'm sure that for most people listening, their eyes glaze over when you start talking about pension plans and what all these figures mean.

The bottom line is that we're going to have a huge, huge number of people who cannot pay the rent, cannot feed themselves and cannot pay their mortgages, and it's going to happen soon if we don't do something.

You compare us to Europe. Let's take the example of France, where, if you retire in France, they have a national system that grants 50% to 55% of the income that you earned if you've worked 40 years—and not at the same company; this is not company-based; this is nationally based. This is called a reasonable system, where people are guaranteed a dignified retirement.

Are we guaranteed a dignified retirement in Ontario? Absolutely not. And even if you're diligent, even if you invest the maximum RSP amount every year, if the stock market takes a nosedive, you're sunk. Come on; we've got to do something.

Does this bill deliver? I'm going to talk about it in my 10 minutes, but the simple answer is “something”; it delivers something. Does it deliver what we need? No; it

delivers something. It's so classically Liberal: It delivers an inch when you need a mile. We'll talk about the mile when I get up for my 10 minutes, but the bottom line is, we should be very, very worried, we in this House who are on the Freedom 95 plan and those outside who are watching.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Charles Sousa: The debate around pensions is crucial, especially in these economic times when we've seen the downturn. In our discussions with a number of those affected, like those from Nortel and otherwise, we have to do what's necessary to protect those who are in a pension plan and we have to encourage those who aren't to become part of one. We certainly need to amend some of our acts.

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The process going forward is proactive, especially now. We must update our employment pension system; that's why we are bringing this forward. We also know that the orphanage account that my colleague spoke about by the Nortel folks is important to recognize, because what they're saying is that they don't want to go into a windup at the expense of possible increases. That's why we have taken some steps in this proactive nature to ensure that we fund the pensions and enable the guarantee that is unique to Ontario.

I would say that since March 2009, Ontario has taken a number of important steps to modernize Ontario's employment pension system. We've introduced a temporary solvency funding relief program to protect jobs and families. We've worked to simplify pension divisions when marriage ends. We've initialized and initiated the first-ever actuarial study to examine the future of the pension benefits guarantee fund. And we've established an advisory council on pensions and retirement income.

We're also actively participating in a broader national discussion about improving the Canadian retirement income system. In this regard, Minister Duncan recently met with his provincial counterparts in Whitehorse, where they had productive discussions about the future of pensions for all Canadians. We plan to continue these discussions early this summer.

But this bill, Bill 236, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act—the specific reforms that are included in the act would, if passed, provide for the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate organizations while protecting benefit security for plan members and pensioners.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

The member for Ottawa Centre, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank my colleagues from Wellington–Halton Hills, Parkdale–High Park and Mississauga South for their comments.

I just want to talk a little bit more about the issue around LTDs, the long-term disability benefits, and how they are different from the Nortel pension. In particular, I

want to highlight the remedy they are seeking from both the federal government and the provincial government. I think it's important that on the provincial government side, the Minister of Finance consider those remedies, because these are unique circumstances.

In terms of the federal government, what the beneficiaries are asking for is:

(1) a law to take effect immediately allowing the government to ensure the continued income replacement and other benefits of LTD beneficiaries, whatever the fate of the employer;

(2) an immediate and retroactive amendment for the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide privileged creditor status to LTD beneficiaries;

(3) an immediate intervention by the Canadian Human Rights Commission to monitor the CCAA and BIA proceedings for Nortel; and

(4) special tax treatment for individuals on LTD invoking the fairness rules regarding whatever they may recover as creditors.

In terms of the provincial government, the remedies they are seeking are as follows:

(1) insurance laws must be amended to include so-called self-insured plans;

(2) pension laws must be clarified, amended or expended to deal with pensions other than retirement pensions;

(3) corporate and employment laws need to ensure all directors be explicitly responsible for LTD benefits; and

(4) given their large part of responsibility, provinces must be prepared to complement whatever can be obtained from federal or other resources to ensure the continuation of LTD benefits at their fullest.

Of course there's a lot there, both from Nortel pensioners and in terms of the long-term disability beneficiaries. What we need to ensure—and of course the Minister of Finance and his staff will know better as to what's possible and how best to work on these circumstances—is that we pay attention to these.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak very briefly on this—actually, I guess I've got 20 minutes.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Okay. The previous Liberal speaker had 10 minutes, it would appear—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It was left over—

Mr. Ted Arnott: Okay. I appreciate the clarification. Thank you very much.

I'm glad to have this opportunity to speak slightly longer on this Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll see how you do.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'll be graded afterwards. Certainly my constituents will want to grade me, as they do every four years.

The fact is that this is important legislation, and it's a very important issue for the people of Ontario and my constituents in Wellington-Halton Hills. When I start talking about this for 20 minutes, I want to begin with informing the House of some of the serious concerns we have about pensions. Pensions to people mean retirement security. If you have a pension—a good pension—it means peace of mind over the long term as to how you're going to pay your bills in your retirement years.

I think it's important to point out and note that the vast majority of Ontarians have no pension whatsoever, save and except perhaps having paid into the Canada pension plan. There are a huge number of seniors in my riding whose only income is old age security and the guaranteed income supplement from the federal government, possibly topped up a little bit by CPP. The fact is, that's the income that a substantial number of the households in my riding, particularly seniors, have to make do with.

I think it's also important to point out that our pension laws and regulations must be fair, they must be understandable and they must lend security to the investments under management. That's a very important principle too: to ensure that the pension fund can meet its obligations over the long term.

It was pointed out earlier in the debate this afternoon that members of provincial Parliament do not have a defined benefit pension plan. I think that's worth noting as well, because I think, Mr. Speaker, you would probably agree that the vast majority of our constituents believe that we have a very generous defined benefit pension plan. Of course, the members of Parliament in Ottawa have those sorts of arrangements. We had that here up until 1996, when the government of the day—I think with the support of the opposition parties, if I'm not mistaken; my recollection is that the Liberals in opposition voted for the pension reform bill, as did the New Democrats. The fact is, we scrapped our so-called “gold-plated” or defined benefit pension plan and replaced it with something very different: I would call it a defined contribution retirement savings plan. The way it works, of course, is that the employer, the Legislative Assembly, puts aside a certain amount of money every month into a registered retirement account for members. Most of us have additional room to top it up, like people would do with RRSPs. Those of us who are prudent and concerned about our retirement—most cases, I suspect—do top up those monies to ensure that our maximum RRSP contribution is realized. But the fact is that we don't have a defined benefit pension at the present time.

I think it's also true to say that most Canadians do not save enough for their retirement. We see this from time to time: accounts in the newspaper about people who are leaving RRSP room without making the contributions. Obviously some people, at the end of a year, just don't have the means to make those kinds of contributions, but I think it's true to say that we are not saving enough for our retirement in general in our province.

This bill, Bill 236, of course—if we listen to the government—is intended to respond to some of the problems which have been raised through the Expert Commission on Pensions, established in 2006, also known as the Arthurs report. The report made some 142 recommendations, and the government, in response to the Arthurs report, has brought forward Bill 236.

When this bill was first introduced in the Legislature back in December, the government told us that this bill was intended to clarify the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs and eliminate partial windups. A partial windup occurs when only part of a pension plan is closed. The bill was also intended to facilitate the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate reorganizations, while protecting benefit security for plan members and pensioners; to increase transparency and access to information for plan members and pensioners—always obviously desirable—and to enhance regulatory oversight, improve plan administration and reduce compliance costs. Those were the objectives of Bill 236.

Some of the key elements of the legislation that I think it's important to point out are as follows: Pension benefits will be immediately vested if this bill is passed, instead of being vested after two years of participation in a pension plan. I understand that this is similar to the legislation that currently exists in Quebec. We understand this may be beneficial in many cases for some employees. It would also add to the administrative burden for employers, particularly for those in industries with high employee turnover. We believe that this may lead to a trend toward longer eligibility periods for membership; I very much suspect that that will be the unintended consequence.

I know that the bill is intended to extend grow-in benefits—and this is a controversial provision in the bill. Currently, I understand that in the event of a partial or full windup of a pension plan, members with 55 or more age-plus-service points are entitled to grow into a pension plan's subsidized early retirement provisions. The grow-in pensions will be extended, if this bill is passed, to all terminations of employment for members who meet the 55-points requirement except for termination for cause, with or without a plan windup. We've heard that this aspect of the bill will be costly for plan sponsors and may be administratively burdensome. Apparently no other jurisdiction in Canada, save and except Nova Scotia, has such rules. The pension review panel in Nova Scotia has recommended against making such rules mandatory. I understand that the Association of Canadian Pension Management also opposes this provision.

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As well, I have information that was provided to us by the law firm Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt. They express concerns about this aspect of Bill 236. They make an interesting argument as to how this is going to be very costly. I think it's something that all members would want to consider.

I'm also aware that Bill 236 deals with the concept of phased retirement. It would, if passed, limit phased retire-

ment measures in this bill. They would be permissive rather than required. Plan members who are at least 60 years of age, or 55 or more and entitled to an unreduced pension, and whose pay is reduced, may enter into a written agreement to receive a partial pension not to exceed 60% of the member's pension. As I understand it, these rules are restrictive, but many consider that this is a move in the right direction.

With respect to partial windup of pensions: As is the case in the province of Quebec, partial windups will be removed from the legislation, as I understand it. There are traditional provisions for partial windups in process. In the interim, plan administrators will not be required to purchase annuities for members affected by a partial windup. I understand that this is consistent with a recent decision of the Financial Services Tribunal in a case which is known as *Imperial Oil Ltd. versus Superintendent*, which was released in December 2009.

Another important provision of Bill 236 is the issue with respect to sale-of-business provision. The procedures in the legislation, I understand, in respect of asset transfers, mergers, division of pension plans and divestitures are being simplified with Bill 236. This will be subject to prescribed rules.

Under Bill 236, in most circumstances, approval of the superintendent will be required. In addition, in certain circumstances, plan members will be permitted to consolidate their benefits in one pension plan.

Another interesting provision of Bill 236 is it deals with small benefits amounts and it increases those amounts. Small benefits amounts will be increased. The legislation currently permits a lump-sum cash payment of a pension if the amount of pension payable upon the normal retirement date is less than 2% of the year's maximum pensionable earnings under the Canada pension plan, which, in 2009, I understand, was \$46,300. We're told that this is being increased to 4% of the year's maximum pensionable earnings—or if the commuted value of a member's pension is less than 20% of the year's maximum pensionable earnings. With immediate vestings of pensions, there may be a higher frequency of small benefits being cashed out. We're told that increasing the limit may make sense in these circumstances.

Bill 236 also deals with surpluses and the sharing of surpluses on full windup. Under Bill 236, surplus payments to a plan sponsor upon windup of a pension plan will be permitted, even where the documents do not so provide, if there's a surplus-sharing agreement with plan members, former members and beneficiaries.

Bill 236 also has provisions related to the notice of plan amendments issue. The legislation currently differentiates between ordinary amendments and adverse amendments. In the case of an adverse amendment, 45 days' notice must be provided to members. The reforms require 45 days' advance notice for all plan amendments. This will be administratively burdensome and costly, particularly in the case of routine amendments.

While this pension reform bill, Bill 236, generally expands the notice requirement for pension plan amend-

ments, amendments relating to the transfer of assets authorized by sections 79, 80 and 80.2, or the amended section 81, are specifically exempted from the requirement.

Another important provision of Bill 236 is the issue of electronic communication. Pension legislation will explicitly permit members' statements and other communications to be sent electronically. Exemptions to the general rule may be prescribed, and this should reduce costs and administrative burdens for employers. Certainly, in 2010, we should be able to communicate electronically, and if there's a requirement to change the legislation to make that possible, that's something that makes sense to me.

Restructuring and insolvency is another important issue that this bill deals with. The superintendent under this legislation will be empowered to approve agreements in restructuring proceedings under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act or under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.

Our caucus believes that there are a number of things that are missing from this legislation that we need to point out during the course of this debate. In Bill 236, there is no mention made of extending protection of pension benefits of bankrupt employers, nor the provision of a public retirement savings option, nor the relaxation of fund requirements.

We're also pointing out that plan members seeking to transfer or consolidate their split pension assets to one plan—as in the case of MPAC workers, who were affected by past divestment—want to retain their previous Ontario public service, or OPS, employment and credit from the original pension plan. They are not able to get confirmation that this legislation will provide this. So here's a case of a number of employees who have moved from one employer to another and would like to be able to transfer those pension opportunities, and unfortunately, Bill 236 does not give them the assurance that they are asking for.

Again, I would like to point out the fact that I had a meeting with constituents in my riding in Georgetown on Monday. These gentlemen who came to see me are retirees from Nortel and they are very, very concerned about their future retirement security as a result of the bankruptcy of Nortel some time ago. They proposed to me what they call the Ontario pension plan orphanage, a home for stranded defined benefit pension plans. I had met with them previously, but this opportunity came up and it was helpful to get an update on the situation. As we know, Nortel's support for both of its defined benefit pension plans is tenuous. My understanding is that major asset sales will be completed by March 2010, and therefore the issue is very, very urgent because, as they said to me, the train may very well be leaving the station very soon.

The Financial Services Commission of Ontario—or FSCO, as we call it—starts a windup when Nortel withdraws support and immediately crystallizes fund assets and moves to annuitize, which, as I understand it,

means that whatever money is left in the pension fund is taken to create annuities for the pensioners. As we know, annuities are being sold at historically expensive levels because of interest rate levels at the present time. Pensions immediately and permanently may be reduced by up to 30% or more. These pensioners would have no opportunity for their assets to recover. Even if the stock market goes up, they wouldn't be any better off. There would be no effective or fair way to build in a Nortel estate settlement that might be forthcoming, and there would be no chance to benefit from key aspects of the Arthurs report; i.e., the agency for stranded pension plans, and improved pension benefits guarantee fund benefits. The point they made to me is that there is a need for immediate government action to prevent the windup and create this home for stranded plans immediately.

The orphanage concept is based on a number of principles, including:

- the plan continues with initial benefits at a supportable level;
- the pension benefits guarantee fund supplements Ontario benefits on a monthly basis;
- improved pension benefits guarantee fund benefits could be integrated into the future;
- the funds asset allocation would be consistent with a conservative investment profile;
- benefits would be adjusted biannually, or twice a year, based on investment program returns;
- the government would assure minimum benefits not less than the conventional windup;
- any surplus above the original planned benefits would be absorbed by the pension benefits guarantee fund;
- the Nortel estate settlement would be integrated to improve benefits when claims materialize; and
- the pension benefits guarantee fund benefits could be combined with the estate claim and other government support to annuitize pensions if beneficial to all parties, as has been done in some cases in the past.

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They conclude with the fact that, under this proposal, the risks would be manageable, and individual and societal costs would be reduced.

Under the conventional windup, which, if action isn't taken, will most likely be what will happen, their pensions will immediately be reduced and frozen at up to 30% less than what they would normally expect to get.

Under the orphanage proposal, the impact on pensions would be approximately half of windup, and there would be biannual pension adjustments, as I said earlier, dependent on fund investment success. In other words, if the funds invested did well, hopefully, there would be more money for the retirees. There would be participation in an improved pension benefits guarantee fund benefit, hopefully, up from \$1,000 to up to \$2,500 per month.

Fund equities would have time to recover from the market slump. As we know, the stock market started to tank in the fall of 2008, and it has rebounded con-

siderably. We would hope that there will be continued strength in our equity markets in the months and years ahead, which would mean that this would be a much better solution for the Nortel pensioners. I believe it would be.

The Nortel estate claim integrated into recovery of pension benefit levels would be another attractive aspect. The benefits would be guaranteed at conventional wind-up plus upside potential—again, another conclusion that would be advantageous to the pensioners.

Comparing the impact for the province, if there is a conventional windup of their pension plan, the pension benefits guarantee fund will likely need \$277 million to meet the obligations that will be required. That's a lot of money. There would be increased societal and economic impact costs over the long term.

However, under the orphanage proposal, which is, again, what we're advocating here, there would be no immediate infusion of \$277 million into the pension benefits guarantee fund. The pension benefits guarantee fund supplement would be much smaller and payments would be spread over multiple budgets. It is estimated that the cost would be \$1 million or \$2 million a month and would be decreasing over time as the number of participants were to decline. There would be minimal societal and economic impact costs.

There is a slight risk that fund investments will not support minimum benefits over the long term, but it is hopeful that that would not be the case.

There would be improved public confidence in the provincial public retirement income system—and this is something that I think all of us would hope would be the outcome.

There could be a phase-in of the full Arthurs report benefits.

In conclusion, this proposal for the province would be less costly with minimal risk. The impact on the typical Nortel pensioner, I think, is something worth looking at. Certainly, for the typical Nortel pensioner, this would mean more money in the bank, more retirement security and greater peace of mind for these workers, who have given many years of their working lives to build a company that, through no fault of theirs, failed in the last couple years. Again, I would suggest that it's important that we look at this issue from their perspective.

I would encourage the government to carefully consider the proposal and the recommendations. It's interesting that members of the government side have brought these concerns forward during the course of this debate, so I think this is something that we could work together on across party lines to try to address this serious issue to provide income security to more Ontarians in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Just before questions and comments, pursuant to standing order 47(c), there having been six and a half hours of debate on Bill 236, the debate is deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Hon. John Gerretsen: In light of the fact that this is such a stimulating debate, we would like it to continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have to say that the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, despite the fact that he spoke twice as long, did a very good job.

I don't want to play the gender card, but when people start talking about pensions and vesting, my eyes do glaze over. I'm going to try to make this a little bit more interesting.

The bottom line here, folks who are watching at home, is that most people in Ontario are going to retire with very, very little. Their CPP plan is a thousand bucks a month—\$1,000 a month. Try living in Toronto, for example, on \$1,000 a month. I can tell you, you will barely pay your rent if you live in a bachelor apartment. You will be at the food bank. You will be going to a place to take cast-off clothing because you will not be able to survive.

Our financial planners tell us to set aside a little. I'm sorry, folks—set aside a little of what? Most Ontarians, almost 300,000 of them, have lost their jobs. Most Ontarians live paycheque to paycheque to paycheque, and they don't have extra money. My goodness, it's tax time, folks. It's tax time, and even I—most of us have to borrow to put the maximum into our RSPs and pay that off. Come on.

These are people who make a good salary in this place. Imagine everybody else out there. And what do you get for your RSPs? You're at the vagaries of the stock market. Maybe you're lucky; maybe you're not. Maybe you retire when the stock market's up; maybe you don't. The problem is vast, and we have to do something.

I'm happy to talk to this bill. I'm happy to also talk about what happens in other jurisdictions because, my goodness, it's so much better. I live for that moment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes on what is obviously a very important issue that has seized all members of the Legislature. I'm happy to have a couple of minutes on it.

I must say, I do remember very clearly some time ago when the Premier first began to speak on this issue. He talked very clearly about the fact that he felt there needed to be a national strategy developed when it came to pension and pension reform in this country. It wasn't suggesting for a second that here in Ontario we stop doing the work that we needed to do, but he did speak very clearly about how we needed a national strategy.

I thought it was interesting, when the member of the third party spoke in the last two-minute round, she spent a bit of time bemoaning the fact that things are not better on pension issues in the province of Ontario, which we all agree with, and that's fine, but she offered as a solution France, which, of course, is a country. So here we were criticizing what's going on in Ontario—and we all believe that more needs to be done to make it better—but there was the country of France, which has a national plan, apparently, offered as an example of an opportunity

for improvement. I'm happy to hear that, and it sounds like there is support for the idea that we need a broader, macro view of what we need to do in this country.

Bill 236, as you've heard, is just a start. The finance minister has been very clear. As a result of the Arthurs report, we're implementing some of his recommendations, but there is more legislation that will come on this issue.

We also, of course, need to be very mindful that there are two thirds of people in this province who do not have access to a pension plan. We need to be cognizant of their concerns when it comes to this work. But I must say, I've heard others in the Legislature today talking about Nortel, and I will tell you that in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan there is a significant number of AbitibiBowater pensioners who find themselves in a similar circumstance, and as a government, we're working to see what it is we can do on their behalf.

I know that the federal government has been drawn into this discussion as well. The province of Quebec is engaged, and we're working very diligently to see what we can do for those AbitibiBowater pensioners, not only in northwestern Ontario but in Quebec and southern Ontario as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened intently to the member from Wellington-Halton Hills. I think he covered pretty well everything, including the Nortel debate, which I think is important.

But if you look at the bill, there are a few things here that are worth putting on the record. One of them is very important, actually. I had an opportunity to participate, when I was assistant to the Minister of Finance back in government—and this is the partial windup. I did attend some of the meetings on the Monsanto case, which, in pension law, is very much a precedent. This whole idea of a partial windup would be repealed upon proclamation of this report. I personally think that's a good idea.

But there's also a supplementary part, which is very interesting. Some of this stuff is quite boring until you get drilled down on it. One is the surplus-sharing agreement; that's another one. What is a surplus of a pension at any given point in time, or a deficit, for that matter, as we're experiencing today? The key thing here is, it would really come down in real law to asking who the contributor was. If the contributor has, under a contractual arrangement, some obligations to fund to a certain level, obviously the surplus should belong to the person who's contributing. That's not the case, because sometimes—it's really called a deferred gratification for a non-contributing pensioner to a pension fund, and they want to share in the surplus. In that case, they should also share in the liability. Today, we have the case where there's a liability because the market is down and all pension fund valuations are down; they're off the table. So I think that's a very important one as well.

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This bill is typical of what has happened. If the government assumes interference, they assume liability.

The NDP in 1993 provided the opening here. The too-big-to-fail agreement with Algoma created the problem, and they now own the liability. That's the real truth of why pensions are screwed up today. There is a deficit because they allowed them to not completely fund them. It was a government order that did it, and now we're all in trouble.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

The member for Wellington—Halton Hills, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to respond to the members for Parkdale—High Park, Thunder Bay—Atikokan and Durham. As I was making eye contact around the chamber while I was making my remarks, I was pleased to see that all three of those members were listening quite intently. I'm sorry I wasn't able to command the attention of the Minister of the Environment in a way that would have made him more impressed, but I'm glad he's here too, and I want to express my appreciation to him for his intervention, which allows the debate to continue.

Let's go back to some of the fundamental principles that we talk about that inform this debate. I think it's important that we all remember that pensions mean retirement security for Ontarians. I think it's important that we also recognize, as was said a minute ago, that about two thirds of Ontarians do not have a pension at all, and we've got to be concerned about their interests as well. We've got to make sure that pension laws and regulations are fair, they must be understandable—and, of course, as we know, this is a highly technical issue that is, at times, a bit tedious as we go through it line by line, but I think it's important that we make an effort to make these complex concepts understandable to the people of Ontario, especially the pensioners themselves. We need to make sure that our laws and regulations lend security to the investments that are under management so as to ensure that the pension funds can meet their obligations over the long term.

This bill, Bill 236, as I understand it, is the government's response to the Arthurs report. I look forward to the continued debate on this issue. I would hope that this bill is going to committee. Even though we prorogue on Thursday, it will most likely be sent to a standing committee of the Legislature. Most likely, there will be public hearings on the issue so that we can hear a little more from some of the experts. Hopefully the government will be interested in listening to the possible amendments that might come forward from the opposition and the government members themselves to improve the bill, make sure that we get it right and make sure that it is in the public interest as we go forward to protect the pensions of the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to rise and speak about this. First, I wanted to just comment on a couple of comments that I heard out there, one about the Bob Rae

government. As you know, Bob Rae is no longer a member of the New Democratic Party; he's, in fact, a Liberal—and we would argue that he always was. I'm certainly not going to defend the actions of the Rae government, so that's number one.

Number two, when the member across the way talked about federal versus provincial, I would absolutely agree. There's no doubt that the best solution to this problem would be a federal one, an expansion of the Canada pension program, and to do it now. I want to win the lottery, but the reality is, I'm not budgeting on it; I'm not budgeting on winning the lottery. I would like the federal government to act, but, hey, I'm not counting on it. That's exactly why the New Democratic Party put forward their own program, and I'm going to talk about that program in a minute.

I want to start with where we should always start from in politics—this is a philosophical point here. You can start from where you are and then just hope to get re-elected, maybe tinker around the edges in a populist kind of way, looking at the polls all the time, or you can start from principle. I would assert that in the instance of speaking about pensions, the principle we should speak about always is a dignified retirement for everyone, just as we speak about health care for everyone in the province. The aim of any pension program should be that no senior, no retired person, goes without. That's the aim. We start from there, we look at where we are now, we examine the chasm that exists between the two and then we try to fill that chasm in. I would assert that what is proposed in this bill is, you know, a little tinkering around the edges, a couple of good things. We're in support of the good things, no problem, but the chasm remains.

When I spoke about the situation in France—and I could have spoken about the situation in Sweden. By the way, in Sweden you get to count the years you spend at home raising children toward your retirement, you get to count the time you spend in school toward your retirement, and you're still guaranteed a dignified retirement in which you receive a living wage. Hey, a living wage: There's another great theme that we will speak more about in the ensuing years, I'm sure. But know that the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK all have better conditions for their seniors.

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again I can hear my friends from across the aisle say, "But they're federal governments." Do we wait on the federal government for everything in this Legislature or do we act now? Do we do something now to make a change? For those who are tuning in at home, we're talking about pensions. Only 35% have an occupational pension plan in this province, and within that 35% are not included the members speaking here.

The member from Wellington—Halton Hills spoke about that a little bit. People are shocked by that, quite frankly shocked. People who get elected to this chamber, who take years out of whatever their career was before—

usually their most productive years, quite frankly. They serve for who knows how long, since of course it's at the behest their constituents whether they get elected or re-elected, but then what happens? I was only half joking about the Freedom 95 plan. I mean, nobody in this place can afford to retire. Nobody out there can afford to retire either. Just 35%; think about it. That means that the rest of all Ontarians cannot ever afford to retire unless they have independent means or unless, like our parents' generation—and this is why I think we haven't really come face to face with this issue. The generation that went before the boomer generation tended to be—and even, quite frankly, many of the boomers are—house-rich. But let me tell you, if you're counting on your house—if you're one of the lucky ones who owns one—to fund you in your retirement, think again.

I have a story about that; it's about a congregant. She had a beautiful house near High Park. She counted on her house because she had been a homemaker all her years; she had worked, but very little. She was of that generation where women mainly and mostly, in the city of Toronto, stayed at home. She sold her house, and the house paid for her retirement in a retirement home, a very nice, private one. It cost her, toward the end, about \$5,000 a month. By the way, people don't know that: If you're going to pay for retirement homes, because of course we don't have universal care that's of the level that one would want for our seniors, because—hey, another issue, but we don't have those 3.5 hours per day for senior care in our subsidized homes.

So she had the means to pay for a private home. It was a good one. It was a caring one. It cost, toward the end, \$5,000 a month to stay there. She literally—

Interruption.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Excuse me. Someone has a BlackBerry near an open microphone. I won't point out who it might be. Is there one lying on a desk? It bothers the interpretation.

Okay, we'll continue.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I happily gave up a few seconds for that.

Anyway, to go back to her story: So what was her problem? Her problem was that she outlived her equity. She outlived the money from her home to pay for her retirement. This happens all the time, and those are people with means. Those are people who are equity-rich, who have homes. I also know people in my constituency and had people in my congregation who worked hard all their lives, had two incomes, raised their children, put them through college and retired but didn't have occupational pension plans and counted on CPP—or, rather, didn't think about it. That's that reality: Most people don't think about it. They sort of assume that something will be coming to them from all their years of hard work. Well, they were mistaken. So now, between the two of them, they can't afford to pay their rent, they can't afford to eat, and they're in their 80s. They use a food bank. After years of working, is this what we're looking forward to? That's what we're talking about.

That's the meat and potatoes of what we're speaking about here: What are we going to do?

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Quite frankly, other jurisdictions around the world, whether provincial or federal, do it so much better because they start with the principle, the moral, if you will, that we all deserve a dignified retirement, and they work back from there: How are we going to get it?

The New Democratic Party has a plan. It's a plan that was acknowledged by the Toronto Star editorial board. They acknowledge that it's a good plan; it's a very good plan. Why don't we do it? Or, better yet, why doesn't the government come back with a suggestion that mirrors it? It's called the Ontario retirement plan, because for New Democrats, we don't wait for the federal government to act before we look after people—again, principle before polls. We don't wait for those in Ottawa to look after our seniors in Toronto or in Thunder Bay, because we actually feel a sense of responsibility for the people in our constituencies who are suffering right now.

I know we all share these stories. We hear them, I know we do, of people who live and cannot afford—literally cannot afford—the basics, because they're seniors and because they don't have pension plans other than CPP. I know we hear these stories.

My friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke told me about the days when it was expected, truly cultural, that children would look after their seniors, that they would take them into their homes. That's assuming that they have homes. Now, with 300,000 unemployed and the economy in the tank, I don't know how realistic that is for a lot of people in our communities. But let's assume that even that is the case. The burden on the sandwich generation, in that case, is immense. We know that. Again, usually it's a generation that has children in university—the worst-funded universities per capita, per student in Canada here in Ontario. So you're paying a ridiculous amount to send your children to post-secondary education, and you have your parents at home. Is this the ideal that we're striving for? Is this what we're looking forward to? Hopefully that isn't the solution, but it has to be the solution if nothing else is forthcoming, if it's only this bill that we have to look forward to.

I don't know about you, but the reality is that when you look demographically, each successive generation in Ontario is worse off than the one before it. They used to be better off. It used to be that an immigrant family came to Canada, settled and worked really hard, worked three jobs—you know the story—paid for the kids' way through university, paid for their houses—often with cash, in those days—bought a car, and the kids did better, way better. The kids of that generation bought the house, bought the cottage, and had the car as well. But the next generation isn't doing as well.

Now if you ask young people, “On one salary, could you afford to buy a house in Toronto and a car?”—never mind a cottage; forget about that—they will tell you, “Absolutely not. It takes two salaries.” And even with two salaries in the city of Toronto, you cannot afford to

buy a house unless you get some help from somewhere or you save or you're really lucky and have really good jobs. Then it takes two people working full-time. Then, of course, if you do that, when it comes time for children, you're going to have to pay for daycare and over \$1,000 a month per child. This is the new economic reality.

What's really quite frightening about this situation is that, whereas we boomers are a little bit hesitant about retirement—quite frankly, the question really does exist: If we did have a retirement plan in this place, how many people would be left? I'll leave that to the individual imaginations of all of us, but how many of us are here because we can't retire?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Nobody.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Ah. Okay.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Everybody's here because they want to be here.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Okay—and, quite frankly, we're the privileged ones; we're the privileged ones. You look at our children and you think: When they get to retirement, what are they going to look forward to? Unless they inherit significant amounts of equity, they are going to be worse off than we are.

This is a significant social and cultural change. It's a significant social and cultural change when the rich get richer, the poor get poorer and the middle class gets emptied out. The ramifications of that scenario upon retirement are dire; they're absolutely dire. That is the economic reality of our province. Like it or not, rail against it or not, that's the economic reality of our province.

So into this chasm, between what should be and what is, falls this bill. There are a couple of good things in it, but boy, oh, boy, will this bill make the difference to someone of my generation in terms of retirement? Will this bill stave off poverty? Will this bill even protect, to the degree they'd need to be protected, those with occupational pension plans, or will it not? I would suggest that it will not.

Will it make a little bit of a difference? Yes, it will. In investing? Yes, it will. But when the goal, when the principle is a dignified retirement for all people—all people, not just some people—then this bill falls, I would suggest, quite woefully short, and it needn't, because again, we're not walking into the promised land here; we're not talking about utopia. All we need to do is look at other jurisdictions—across the ocean, mainly and mostly—to people who do it better, and find out how they do it and what they do. Quite frankly, you'll find that what they do is, the governments—not just the federal government, all governments—step up to the plate and make it a priority, just like we make health care a priority.

Might I remind you that universal health care—which, boy, oh, boy, sets Canada apart, and North America certainly, and made Tommy Douglas the most celebrated Canadian of all time, according to a CBC poll. Why? Because of medicare—did not come in with a whimper? It came in with a bang. It came in against strikes and

opposition. It came in on principle, not on polls. It came in because—and by the way, he never, ever ran a deficit, 17 times—Tommy saw that what was needed was universal health care. He started with that precept, worked back and dealt with all the hurdles that lay between the principle and the reality of his “then,” now.

Our reality now calls for us to look ahead to the principle of a universal pension plan in Ontario. I know that my friend from Toronto—Danforth will tell you—because I'm running out of time—about all of the intricacies of the New Democratic Party's proposal for an Ontario pension plan—and they're not revolutionary; they're not radical. They're something the editorial department of the Toronto Star supported. Here's a very simple solution. Why isn't it there? In fact, Arthurs himself had a number of very simple solutions—again, a step forward, not enough to leap across the chasm from here to there, the principle of a dignified retirement for all—but some sensible suggestions. Even all of those are not in this bill.

How sad is that? How sad is that moment lost? How sad is that moment lost not only for ourselves, not only for our seniors if our parents are still alive, but also for our children and our grandchildren? Again, we're going to struggle. We're going to struggle, even with two salaries, to buy that house and struggle, even with two salaries, to make all the contributions we're going to need to make, if we're not one of the lucky 35%, to actually retire at all.

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To those who are watching, this is that time of year when you should think about these things. Think about it. Think about what it's going to look like in your life if you do not have a pension lined up and, quite frankly—the example of Nortel and AbitibiBowater—even if you do have a pension plan at work, because those pension plans can fail. Those are the examples that we're faced with in Ontario.

The thing is you can't do it alone. This is one of those many instances where we in the New Democratic Party feel the government has a role to play. It has a significant role to play—not just tinkering around the edges and not just keeping one eye on the polls and doing as little as possible to ruffle feathers, as little as possible to get any excitement worked up by anybody, to look good but not necessarily be good. No, that's not going to cut it for your retirement.

For your retirement, my friends who are watching, you are going to need dramatic steps to cross the chasm between what we have now in Ontario—a huge majority of the population is going to retire without a pension, except for CPP of \$1,000 a month, i.e. in poverty, or not. That's the question before us, and it's coming up fast. It's coming up quickly.

Lord forbid, for those of us who are property owners, the real estate market take a dive just when we turn 65—hey, there's a rhyme there—because if you're counting on your home to pay for your retirement, think again. Witness the story I told. Think also, on the bright side, of all of those jurisdictions, travel—look at documentaries if

you can't afford to, if you're like most Ontarians and can't afford to travel anywhere. Look to Europe. Look at what they do in Europe. In Europe, they have a dignified pension scheme for all in most countries. That's not so here and, quite frankly and sadly, not so even with the passage of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to make a few additional comments to Bill 236, on pensions. I made some comments the other day as we went through this particular rotation.

The issue of pensions really had not been brought up to me in my many years here until recently. There are a lot of people I know who have pensions, and they seemed to know the exact date of their retirement, looked forward to it and felt quite comfortable about that situation. But in recent months and years, with the calamities of financial breakdown etc. and the recession around the world, people have taken a much more keen interest in their pension, and, indeed, others have looked at the fact that they don't have a pension at all.

This bill really is quite technical. We're looking at the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate reorganization while protecting benefit security for plan members and pensioners. That's what we're hearing from constituents now, concern in that regard.

What would the technical issues be within this bill? I'm reasonably sure it will go to committee; most of our bills do.

It would look at the requirements for asset transfer between plans as it relates to defined benefits. It would be clarified and simplified. That's just one example of what is in this bill. A prescribed portion of any surplus related to the assets being transferred from the previous employer's plan would be transferred to the successor plan. It would clarify the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs and eliminate partial windups.

Those are just a few of the very technical aspects contained within Bill 236, and I fully expect that it will go to committee and have public hearings.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I can always account that the member from Parkdale-High Park, as a minister and a caring person, will always hope that we are all well taken care of. I ask for your prayers. I mean that quite sincerely, because quite honestly, when you look at how the economy and all this works at the macro level, we often argue that these profit-driven companies, these bad companies—all of the pensions from teachers and the public sector are invested in companies. It's not in a box somewhere. If those companies fail because of John Gerretsen's tough rules and red tape, then there's no money in the pensions. You see, it's all dependent on the economics of it all. So let's just get to the fundamentals here.

We need the private sector to be prosperous so that we can have a prosperous quality of life. That's perhaps an

oversimplification, but if we look at the problems, the guidelines at the ministry, Mr. Dwight Duncan, through FSCO—they actually set the rules. You can't have everything invested in RIM. So there are rules about how much in each sector, and those rules are very important. When the government sets these rules, they assume some of the liability for the outcomes. This is where the government has a responsibility.

But all of this discussion is kind of a moot point, because the only pensions that are guaranteed are public sector pensions. Stelco, Dofasco and Vale Inco are all unresolved companies going into CCAA because of the pension liability issue. Stelco is still arguing in the courts. Inco, Air Canada, Dofasco—all of them.

The employer of record for the public sector is the taxpayer. They are funded differently, and there are different sets of rules. They're the only ones that have "Freedom 55." There is no other plan that's funded to the 55 level.

I'm surprised—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I cannot let the last comment go by without saying something—when the member talked about my tough rules and regulations. The best way that we can secure a healthy future for the next and future generations is to make sure we have the cleanest water, the cleanest air and the cleanest soil conditions out there, and all of the rules that our Ministry of the Environment has are about that, to make sure the environment that we all live in is the best that it can possibly be.

At the same time, he may be interested in knowing that, just yesterday, we posted on the EBR a modernization-of-approvals document, in which we hope to take a risk-management approach with respect to the approvals the Ministry of the Environment is involved in, because we realize full well that in a lot of cases, time is money. If we take a risk-management approach, it means that we will be looking into those situations that present the highest risks, as far as the environment is concerned, in a much more conservative fashion than in the lower-risk situations.

Getting back to the member from Parkdale-High Park, let's talk about Bill 236. Bill 236 is all about creating a level of fairness to ensure that those pensioners are protected when restructuring takes place within corporations. There are many other points that she's made that I agree with her on: that only about 35% of the people of the province of Ontario have any pension plan at all and something should be done about that, and both the provincial and the federal governments should be doing more with respect to the 65% of the people who don't have a pension.

The other thing is, we do not have a defined pension here. What we have is an RRSP program that we all contribute to. The general public quite often thinks that the pension plan we enjoy here is the same as the lucrative pension plan at the federal level, which you and I know is not the case.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments. No, the member for Durham, you've had yours.

Questions and comments. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: My friend from Durham always has more to add, and we probably will hear that later on.

I come to this debate from a northern constituency where incomes have not been robust, as we might say, in the last while, but I also come from a constituency that is most proud to have provided this nation with, I believe, the greatest Prime Minister who ever served the nation, Lester B. Pearson. He was the one—and people will remember. I know my friend from across the floor spoke of universal health care. Mr. Pearson brought universal health care to the nation. Mr. Pearson brought the Canada pension plan to the nation.

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What has that meant for folks? It has meant that seniors in this province, 80% of them now, have incomes above the poverty line—80%. A generation ago, it was the opposite: 20% of seniors had incomes above the poverty line. It makes a remarkable difference to Canadians as we speak.

I take the member's point, that we have to look at the generations that follow us. The demographics are not totally in our favour. As someone who represents a demographically older population in my constituency, I know full well the difficulties that seniors have in coping with some of the day-to-day costs of just living. We can't represent Manitoulin Island and places like Elliot Lake and Dubreuilville and not understand that some of the challenges of our folks are quite real. But they will not be fixed today.

This bill before us is a modest effort, but an effort that will fix some of the problems in our pension system.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Parkdale-High Park, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you to all of those who weighed in on this debate. To my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin, speaking passionately about his own constituents—and I trust that he is passionate about them—I would basically offer that there was a little bit of a blip there between the statistics of 80% and 20%. It was a particularly rich, shall I say, economic period in the history of North America. I think you're going to see in the long run, as you suggested yourself, that things are going to get a lot worse.

My friend the Minister of the Environment: always a pleasure. I always like the fact that the Minister of the Environment laughs a lot and smiles, don't you think? That actually makes the environment in here a lot more bearable. At any rate, he suggested that this is just a modest bill making modest proposals. That's what I said; I absolutely agree. But the problem is, we need so much more than a modest bill with modest proposals—and we could do so much more in this province; we don't have to wait for the feds.

To my friend from Durham, who is always entertaining, always interesting, suggesting that it is in fact the private sector that bakes the pie that we slice up, might I suggest to him that he look again across the ocean at social democratic countries, where not only the pie is bigger but the slices are bigger too; not only is the economy more robust in terms of private enterprise, but guess what? You get a dignified retirement, universal child care—even free post-secondary education. And why? Because, yes, the pie is bigger, but it's more fairly distributed.

Thank you all for weighing in. Again, this is not earth-shattering. We need earth-shattering where retirement is concerned in this province. And yes, of course, the federal government should do more—much, much more. That we agree on. Should we do more? I think yes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have—is that correct, Mr. Speaker?—9:55 left of my 20-minute talk?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Just for clarification: After the six and a half hours, the debate continued, and then after seven hours, you're down to 10 minutes per speaker.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I just said that tongue in cheek, Mr. Speaker. Thank you ever so much. I know that when it has your ruling, it also has your blessing.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to rise today to speak about Bill 236, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2009. But before I begin, I would like to thank the very hard-working ministry staff and the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan himself, for the amount of time and energy already invested in this pension bill.

Finance Minister Duncan introduced Bill 236, the first of two major pension bills, this past December 9, 2009. This is a major step in our government's plan to make critical improvements to our province's pension legislation. Bill 236 will address the needs of pensioners, plan members and sponsors in our province.

Since the introduction of this bill in December of last year, there has been a wealth of debate on Bill 236. The MPP from Pickering-Scarborough East and PA to the Minister of Finance, as well as Yasir Naqvi, the revenue PA and member from Ottawa Centre, along with many other government and opposition members, have contributed a great deal of constructive dialogue. Thank you to everyone who has debated this bill to this point in time.

In a previous debate, my friend from the riding of Pickering-Scarborough East spoke about the recent economic downturn. This cannot be stressed enough. Some members in the opposition and the third party want to ignore or downplay the impact of the global financial crisis, and would have us believe that instead we're helping certain pensioners, such as Nortel's, because there were by-elections called in Ottawa West-Nepean and Toronto Centre. This certainly is untrue. It is perhaps inappropriate to speak to that and, as a potential pensioner in Ontario, I think it was totally inappropriate.

The fact of the matter is that the finance minister and his staff have been working tirelessly on this bill for about two years.

Let's return to the facts and deal with them. It cannot be ignored that it was confirmed in the 2009 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review that the current global downturn has had a significant impact on Ontario families and businesses, as was put forward by us previously. The fact is that we remain in the midst of the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression, almost 80 years ago. The market meltdown experienced worldwide has been felt here in Ontario and has put pension plans in jeopardy along with it. This is why our government has been taking proactive steps to ensure that when the economy stabilizes, Ontarians will be better positioned to lead the rest of the world in recovery.

I'm glad our government knows that we need to take measures to improve the pension system in Ontario, and I support Bill 236, which will do just that.

The Expert Commission on Pensions, chaired by Mr. Harry Arthurs and put in place by our government in 2006, has done a great deal of work leading up to the pension bill we have before us today. The commission held 11 public hearings attended by between 700 and 800 individuals, received 120 submissions and commissioned 17 research projects. Two years later, in 2008, the commission produced its final report, entitled *A Fine Balance: Safe Pensions, Affordable Plans, Fair Rules*. This report is a wealth of information on the topic of pensions in Ontario. There is a lot of historical background on pensions in this report as well.

Taking a historical scope on pensions, we know from the report that Ontario workers have been receiving occupational pensions provided by their employers since the middle of the 19th century. Historical reports and studies on the pension system go back at least as far as 1889. It has already been noted in this debate that the crux of these historical pension studies, and more recent studies as well, focuses on whether pensions should be provided directly by government or by employers acting either voluntarily to reward faithful long-serving employees, making the employer more attractive to a competitive workforce, or to satisfy collectively bargained agreements with their unionized employees.

Since my 20 minutes is nine minutes and 55 seconds, we'll just skip right ahead; we gained about five minutes at that point.

In the past two decades, there has been little review of the pension system, says our Expert Commission on Pensions. Our province has participated in the global economy and therefore has been subject to its financial ebbs and flows. The expert commission's report comments that in the past 20 years efforts at pension reform have been largely ad hoc or reactionary, based on current climate. The report is not necessarily criticizing this observation; however, we know that times change and the economy and demographics shift.

Our government has addressed the changing times in a number of ways, and our new pension bill is a perfect

example. We are faced with new challenges. One of the most glaring challenges is our aging population of baby boomers, who are now reaching retirement age. Some have workplace pensions, and some do not. I'll speak on pensionless workers in a minute or so.

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Some Ontarians have had the ability to contribute to their own life income fund for retirement savings. Our government is helping these people by doubling the amount they can access from 25% to 50%. We also have Ontario workers contributing to defined benefit pension plans in the workplace, which typically define an individual's retirement income based on factors such as years worked and, of course, the income level.

The commission's report says that "public policy in Ontario ought to maintain and encourage DB pension plans." These plans should be encouraged and protected, and they have been in decline for many, many years.

Further, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I'd just like to tell you that the quality of life that retirees are going to have for the rest of their lives is going to be very dependent on the success of what we do here.

In conclusion, fellow members, the Premier and the Minister of Finance are driving forces of pension reform and are leading the way with this legislation. Nationally, Premier McGuinty and Minister Duncan are driving national discussions on pension coverage in general. We are going to see more security for workers with pensions in Bill 236.

Moving forward, we are going to see increased attention to pensionless workers in our province. And we know that there needs to be more dialogue with the federal government, too.

I would like to thank our Premier for his national vision and our finance minister for his active participation at the national summit in Whitehorse, as has been mentioned earlier. Their ongoing commitment to Ontario's workforce, our pension system and our rapidly growing retired population is obvious.

I look forward to further debate on Bill 236. I certainly support it, and, I must say, with the varying opinions in this Legislature the past few days, it is important to know that there's support for the future of pension protection and our aging population in Ontario. I have to tell you that we'll all continue working together. I thank both the opposition and the third party for assisting us to strengthen the pension system and to support our aging population and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians as we move forward with this bill.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all members here. We look forward to your continued support and unanimous approval when this bill does finally come to completion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I do also appreciate the member from Ajax-Pickering, who himself is an employer who probably provides a pension for his employees, as many good employers do. But the point has been made that probably 70% of the people don't have a pension. So it's

worthy of saying that government policy has to be fair to all people where possible.

There are three assumptions by the actuaries when you look at pensions. The three assumptions basically are that the return on equity, the return on investment, should be in the order of 7%. The second assumption is life expectancy. Years ago it used to be 74; now it's probably 94. People are living longer and collecting longer, so the pool has to be bigger. The third is the contributors. This is the most profound change, the number of contributors. Most companies used to be shaped like a pyramid: two retired, 10 working. Now it's the other way around: There are two working and 10 retired. That's the problem. The assumptions—that's why they don't work anymore. They have to redesign it.

This bill does not do any of that. These are very, very minor administrative changes—mostly in language.

The lead debate on this issue is from Jim Flaherty, the federal minister. He's the one who's trying to convene changes to the CCAA as well as the CPP contribution. I can assure you that if you look at pensions, it's very important—and I'm surprised that even here in this House, people really don't have a grasp of how important this really is to the security that underlies all of our aging adults. We talk about the aging strategy, aging at home and the poverty discussion. This is all linked to it, because those liabilities for people living longer will become all of our young people's liabilities. So, if we don't get this right and work collaboratively with the federal government, forget the politics—and the individual has a personal responsibility in all of this. Nothing is free, and we have to plan for the future. Those are the rules, and I think people should be well educated to make some improvements in their own ability to look after themselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest to the member from Ajax-Pickering. It reminded me of going to West Toronto Support Services—and a shout-out to them; they do phenomenal work—and asking the seniors there what they would like me to bring forward here. It's amazing how modest they were in their proposal. They said, "It would be wonderful if we went back to the time when seniors could get into art galleries, museums and public institutions for free."

There's a suggestion for the government. That's not radical. That isn't revolutionary. It's a motion that's on the order paper that's going to be lost in a few minutes, but hey, I'll bring it back. Why don't you do that for our seniors? It would be a wonderful gift to them. It doesn't cost that much. You could reimburse the institutions. It would be a good thing.

We come back to the principle. The principle is, everyone deserves a dignified retirement. In France, the interesting system there is that they don't vest anything. They basically redistribute wealth there. Basically, 50% to 55% of your income, if you work 40 years, that you receive on retirement is paid by young people working now. They pay into the plan. The plan is immediately

disbursed to seniors. The seniors have a dignified retirement.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I hear the member from Durham—not enough young people working, not making enough money to support all the people retiring. But it works moderately well in France and they have the same demographics we have.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I know it needs revamping, but hey, it's way better than being here. I just suggest that this government look at other jurisdictions, not reinvent the wheel. Look at what works better and don't wait for the federal government. Of course we have to push them. Of course the best solution is through the CPP program.

The New Democrats have proposed a system that would work quite well. It would double people's income if they're interested in an opt-in. A suggestion: Let's do it. Let's move forward. Let's not tinker around the edges anymore.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I just want to add a couple of comments to my good friend from Ajax-Pickering. I know he's disappointed because he really wanted to talk for about 20 minutes or probably even more, because I was talking to him beforehand. He wanted more than 20 minutes, and then he was really let down when he only got to speak for 10, because I know how much this is important to him.

Pensions, for me, are quite complex, and I'm certainly not an expert, but it seems that whenever we have economic turmoil within the country, within our province, within our communities, pensions raise their ugly head, for lack of a better word.

The only thing I understand about pensions, and I will admit it, as I said before, is that we in this House don't have a pension. Contrary—and I think you've heard that before—to what some of my constituents say, and I guess all of our constituents when we're out there: "So, you've got your fat pension." I go through the process of telling them, "No, no, that's my federal counterparts," but in many cases I'm not sure I get through.

But we do get, and we're thankful, an RSP contribution which, in the last couple of years—frankly, I should have put the money under the mattress and I think I would have been a little bit better off. Nevertheless, we should be thankful for that because a lot of people don't have that.

I just want to say that what we're doing here today—and I think the finance minister made it very, very clear when he introduced Bill 236. This is a first step. It is very complicated. It's a first step, so let's do it step by step. Let's look at it more as a national objective because, regardless of where we live, as Canadians we need to plan for our future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

The member for Ajax-Pickering, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Just on a final note, I would like to thank the very thoughtful legislators from Durham constituency, Parkdale–High Park, and my good friend from Northumberland–Quinte West. Actually, I consider them all my good friends. Their participation in this fruitful debate on Bill 236 is very much appreciated. Varying opinions will give us all a better overview of what is needed to support the future of pension protection and, more particularly, our aging population in Ontario.

Although it appears that all sides of the Legislature may have different ideas on how to help better, it's important for Ontario pensioners. I'm certainly glad that all sides of the House view the pension issue as critical. It's critical to Ontario's future. It's critical for our seniors. We all will continue working together.

I would, once again, thank them for their efforts and for their input over this time frame. We will strengthen the pension system to support our aging population and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians as we move forward with this bill, Bill 236. Thank you again. I look forward to further debate on Bill 236 in the near future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Duncan has moved second reading of Bill 236. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I believe we have agreement that this vote be deferred until tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Things may work out.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I just have to go by the process; just be patient.

Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I have a request that the vote on the motion by Mr. Duncan for second reading of Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act, be deferred until Thursday, March 4, 2010, during deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is adjourned until 9 o'clock, Thursday morning, March 4.

The House adjourned at 1702.

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No. 212

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 39th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 4 March 2010

Jeudi 4 mars 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 4 March 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 4 mars 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence, inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 3, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act / Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale et la Loi sur le financement des élections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

On February 16, Mr. Bentley moved second reading of Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the bill be called for third reading?

Mr. Peter Kormos: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): So ordered.

ENERGY CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉNERGIE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 235, An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010 and to amend other Acts / Projet de loi 235, Loi édictant la Loi de 2010 sur la protection des consommateurs d'énergie et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

On December 10, 2009, Mr. Phillips moved second reading of Bill 235, An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2009. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote will be deferred to following the conclusion of question period.

Second reading vote deferred.

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters / Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

On February 23, 2010, Ms. Dombrowsky moved second reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote, too, will be deferred to following question period.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Orders of the day. Government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: We have no further business, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 0905 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to welcome members from the Canada Bangladesh Business Council to the House this morning: Georgina Bencsik, Monir Khan, Mirza Rahman and Mohammed Hossain.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's my distinct pleasure to welcome some very special guests to the House this morning—making their first visit, I might add. I'd like members to join me in welcoming Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, the spiritual leader of the 3,000 families comprising the Mississauga Ram Mandir, who is accompanied by Jay Patel from Zimbabwe and my constituency assistant, Humaira Hamayun. Welcome.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm delighted to welcome to the assembly today the parents of the page from my riding, Brady Parcels. We have with us Erin Ivey, Ryan McNaught and Gary Parcels, and they are in the members' gallery. Welcome.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure today to welcome to this House Mr. Scott Lang, a constituent of mine. He's here with Elin Bjur, an exchange student from Sweden. Welcome.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: It's my pleasure to announce that Scarlett Heights entrepreneurial school is touring the Legislature this morning and will be joining us at 11 a.m. to see how this House works.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'm delighted to introduce to the Legislature a group of people from the Canadian Intercultural Dialogue Centre, who are here today to present each MPP with a nutritious, delicious pudding called Noah's Pudding. All those members who do not have an office here in the Legislature, please come by my office to pick them up. They're here, and I'm delighted to see them. Congratulations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Arusa Mithani and the member from Mississauga-Brampton South we'd like to welcome her mother, Nadia Mithani, and her father, Amin Mithani, sitting in the public galleries. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It is my pleasure to welcome the grade 10 civics class from Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute in my riding of Scarborough-Rouge River, who are going to be visiting with us shortly in the gallery.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier. This is the last day before you prorogue the House. There are only a few hours left for the McGuinty Liberals to accomplish the priorities that were set out in the 2007 throne speech before they promise new ones on Monday. On page 4 of your last throne speech, you said you would require the school funding formula to be reviewed by 2010. But like so many other throne speech promises,

you did not do what you said. What makes you think that Ontario families will trust you to act on your new promises?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to confirm to the good people of Ontario and the members of this Legislature that we will, in fact, be proroguing in a few hours. It may be the shortest prorogation in the history of the province. We will complete work today, and we will start afresh on Monday with a speech from the throne delivered by the Lieutenant Governor. We're proud to be so brief, so succinct and so determined not to interfere with what's going on in this Legislature—we're very proud of that—on behalf of the people of Ontario.

My honourable colleague is very much aware of the successes that we have enjoyed with respect to the 2007 throne speech and the achievements that flowed from that. One of those—I know she is very interested in education—is full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, the first program of its kind in North America. It starts in September in 600 schools for some 35,000 children.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Premier, we've heard this week about countless promises that were in your 2007 throne speech that have been broken. It's obvious that Ontario families cannot count on you to do what you say you will do.

The funding model was developed in 1997, a time when student needs and demographics were very different. While enrolment has generally declined, it has exploded in areas like Peel, forcing some boards to choose between a guidance counsellor or a librarian or none at all, and that doesn't even take into consideration the desperate needs of the increased number of children with learning disabilities and special needs.

A review of the formula is desperately needed. You said you would do it in 2010. If you weren't going to do it, why did you say that you would?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think we're only about 60 or so days into 2010. I appreciate my honourable colleague's impatience, but I think we have a bit more time to complete more of that work.

I would remind my honourable colleague about some of the progress we have made working together when it comes to education. We have gone from an era of stress and labour strife to peace, stability and continuing progress—that's measurable progress—in terms of reductions in class sizes, increased higher test scores and higher graduation rates. We've got more teachers than ever before—more teacher-librarians, principals, vice-principals—more books and more investments generally in public education. I think that's real progress.

There's always more to be done, but I don't think anybody can deny that education is a priority for this government, because it's a priority for Ontario families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Premier, in your throne speech of 2007, you promised that it would be done by 2010; it is now 2010. It's a broken promise, and if this

continues and we continue to see more broken promises, you might as well stay prorogued.

You told families that the funding review was a priority, but now the Globe and Mail is reporting that the education ministry is evasive about the fate of the review. Ontario families who have counted on you feel let down because there has been no review, as promised, by 2010.

Why would Ontario families trust you to act on the new promises on Monday when you haven't acted on the ones from 2007?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague may want to recognize that if we had not been continuously changing the funding formula, as we have in fact been doing, then schools would be receiving \$650 million less today than they were in 2002 and 2003. In fact, they're getting \$5 billion more today than they did before.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's amazing.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm delighted that my friend in the NDP is acknowledging this. I want him to be on the record; he says, "It's amazing."

We have smaller classes for 540,000 more children. We have made staying in school until the age of 18 the law, and 13,500 more high school graduates are happening every year. Test scores are up 11%. We've hired over—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. New question.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, Premier McGuinty is set to announce a new set of priorities in his next throne speech, but Ontario families in farming communities are still waiting for him to deliver on what he promised them in the last throne speech. On page 6 of that throne speech in 2007, you said you would help grain and oilseed farmers deal with foreign subsidies. You said you would help farmers but you haven't. Why should Ontario farmers trust you now?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: First of all, I sincerely want to thank the member for the question. I can't tell you how much I was looking forward to this question.

One of the things I want to talk about is risk management. We understood that the suite of programs that were available, quite frankly, weren't working. We came forward with a three-year pilot program. That gave the opportunity to our grain and oilseed farmers to begin the work to get our federal government on board. Three years—we recognized that, but that did not happen.

We know that the suite of programs that are available today need work. That is why the previous agriculture minister began with a coalition and talking about risk management. That, then, came forward at the federal, provincial and territorial—there is more work to do, and quite frankly, if we had the help of the other side of the House in working to get our federal government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Interjections.

1040

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Madam Minister, the Ontario farmers can't trust the McGuinty Liberals, not only because you break your promises to them but because you make them jump through hoops along the way.

The former agriculture minister directed Ontario commodity groups to come together to create a consensus proposal for a risk management plan. The plan has been modelled on the grain and oilseeds program that you referred to. For the last three years, it was jointly funded by the province and the farmers. Unlike other programs to help farmers, this one actually works, but you cancelled it, leaving farmers without protection.

Was the failure to mention that your protection for farmers would only last for three years deliberate, or was it accidental?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I really am pleased to be able to respond to this. We made a commitment for a three-year pilot project. That commitment was honoured. Part of that understanding, from all sides and from every member, was that the federal government had to come to the table. This is based upon historical funding in a 60-40 split. It is totally understood by the agricultural community.

We have more strength with one voice coming forward in recognition of programs that are needed to strengthen not only our agricultural communities but our rural communities. We get it. They get it. We need help to get our federal government on side. That is the only way that our programs are going to work for our farmers now and in the future. We need your help to get the feds on side.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will please come to order—the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the member for Hamilton East.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Madam Minister, you might want to read the throne speech. It didn't speak of a pilot project and it didn't suggest that you would cancel it at the end of three years.

The McGuinty Liberals have no one to blame but themselves for failing to honour the commitments they made. Instead of keeping the commitments he has already made, the Premier finds it easier to make new promises. Ontario farmers are not looking for more promises of support. They don't want processes; they expect you to keep the promises you've already made.

For the last three years, grain farmers have paid premiums into this program, making it almost revenue neutral and at no cost to the provincial government. Why doesn't Premier McGuinty care about rebuilding some of the trust he has already lost in rural Ontario? Minister, why don't you stop making excuses and take action to help Ontario's agricultural community?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I really am very pleased to respond once again; I could talk about this all day. Why do I want to talk about this all day? Because it's critical to our agricultural community. We recognized that the suite of programs, quite frankly, don't work. That's why we came forward with the three-year pilot program.

I quote specifically from the throne speech in 2007: The government established a risk management program in 2007 as a three-year pilot "to help our grain and oilseed farmers cope with internationally subsidized competitors...." We met that commitment, and we met that commitment because we recognized that we had to lead by bringing forward the pilot program. It gave three years for our grain and oilseed farmers to work with our federal government. The coalition is working with us to bring that forward.

I ask the members from across the way. They know.

Interjection.

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Call Bob. We need your help to get the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier.

This House is going to prorogue later today, but on Monday we'll return to the same out-of-touch government.

Earlier this week, the Premier gave a sneak peek of Monday's throne speech to friends with \$950 to spare for his party. Amidst the empty promises, there was no plan for the people struggling in these tough economic times.

My question is, why is the Premier even proroguing if all we can expect is more of the same?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague is referencing an opportunity I had to speak a little bit about what we want to do through the throne speech. Fundamentally, it's about strengthening our province, strengthening the economy so that it generates more jobs and maintains our capacity to support good-quality public services.

My honourable colleague says that there's nothing in our plan, and I'd ask her to wait for it in its fullness. But I want to reassure her and all Ontarians that we will not take our eye off the jobs ball. I think the single most important thing that we can do today for Ontarians, given the state of our economy, is to put in place the conditions that create more jobs for the people of Ontario. I want to assure her that our throne speech will speak to that in extensive detail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families are concerned about the state of their hospitals. Surgeries are being cancelled. Nurses are being fired. Emergency rooms are being closed. The Premier says he has controlled costs, but somehow he has managed to find \$4.5 billion in corporate tax cuts. Now there are reports that the gov-

ernment plans to make hospitals actually compete with each other for cash.

Will the throne speech explain why the Premier is handing out billions and billions of dollars in corporate tax giveaways when our hospitals don't have the funds to provide front-line services to the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague that in addition to reducing business costs so businesses can invest more in technology and in jobs, we're also reducing taxes for people by over \$10 billion. I think it's important to keep that in mind.

As well, I think my honourable colleague knows—and I'd love to get her advice and support, as we come to grips, as a generation of leadership, with the challenges presented by the ever-escalating costs associated with delivering health care to Ontarians. That's an important conversation we're going to begin to engage Ontarians in: What do we need to do to ensure that health care doesn't crowd out our capacity to deliver good education, supports for our vulnerable, investments in environmental protections and in economic development and the like? What do we need to do together to manage that? I'm convinced that, working together, we will find all the answers we need.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: While the Premier was regaling his well-connected friends at his \$950-a-plate dinner with promises of new jobs, real people were losing theirs. In communities across Ontario, jobs keep vanishing. The latest are in Timmins, where Xstrata is moving operations out of Ontario.

Will the throne speech explain why the Premier refuses to ensure that Ontario's resources are developed in Ontario and used to create Ontario jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Coincidentally, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of Xstrata just yesterday in my office, including the senior exec from Switzerland. We had a lengthy conversation about the future of that particular business in Ontario. There are a number of reasons behind the reduction of their business activities in Timmins and a number of reasons for the enhancement of their business activities in the Sudbury region.

The fact of the matter is, we're going to continue to find a way to work with the Xstratas of the world. We look forward, with particular interest and optimism, to developing that section of the north called the Ring of Fire. We think there's tremendous opportunity to be found in mineral resources in northern Ontario. We'll continue to work with northerners and industries as well to ensure that we have those jobs.

1050

PATIENT SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My second question is also to the Premier. Two years ago, Grey Bruce Health Services found one of their pathologists had an error rate of 6%;

36 cases misdiagnosed; 600 patients received a worrying phone call about possible misdiagnoses. Can the Premier tell Ontarians what the government did about that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm happy to speak on the situation at Grey Bruce, the pathology review that was done there. The Grey Bruce hospital pathology department does have a quality assurance process in place where they conduct a second analysis on critical cases before they proceed to surgery. It was their system of checks and balances that actually caught the issue in the first place. They launched a review of the cases and they did find some discrepancies. They reviewed the cases and what they found was that there were no adverse effects. The hospital followed up with doctors and patients in all cases.

They took the right steps to inform patients and the doctors of the review taking place, and now they have implemented even more checks. They've got a regular process of peer review in their department, where they sample cases from each—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here's how Dr. Andrew Padmos of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada characterized the pathology system after the Grey Bruce story surfaced: "It's problematic in so many places." Concerns with cancer tests have been "a concern for a number of years," he said. "There are projected shortages of medical and technological staff.... There are problems with quality control programs that are not uniform in all jurisdictions or of the same high quality." That's what he said.

Two years ago, Dr. Padmos said that the problems were systemic. If this government didn't learn from mistakes discovered two years ago, why should Ontario families trust that these horrible tragedies are going to actually stop now?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I just caution the member opposite that she take the advice of her colleague and not try to use fear for her political gain. I think it is not the right approach or the approach that anyone in this House thinks is appropriate for people.

We are concerned about the situation in Windsor. That is why we have sent in three highly respected physicians to look at what's happened in Windsor, to review the cases, to look at the surgical procedures, to look at what went wrong. I will take their advice very seriously when they report back to me. I have asked for frequent updates. I have asked them to complete their work as quickly as they can, and if they think we need to go beyond Windsor, I will take that advice very seriously.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister can try to dismiss her government's lack of action, but the reality is that there were warning signs that the pathology system was a mess.

Four months ago, in fact, the OMA and the Ontario Association of Pathologists held a symposium about the state of pathology in Ontario. Their report found that a comprehensive framework for quality management was missing, and said that the "approaches to specific tests, guidelines development, [and] accreditation" were "ad hoc." They also found that resources were simply insufficient.

Ontario families should be able to trust their health system. Did the government know about these problems? And if so, why haven't they fixed them?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member referenced the shortage of pathologists in this province, and she's quite right in saying that. When we took office in 2003, there were seven or eight graduating every year from pathology and entering practice. We have actually quadrupled that number. We have made targeted investments to make sure we get the right mix of professionals in our health care system. It does take some time to do that, but we're seeing the results of that now.

I think the member opposite should understand that one of the three people that I have sent in to look at Windsor is in fact Dr. John Srigley. He is the president of the Ontario Association of Pathologists. He is the clinical leader of the pathology and laboratory medicine program at Cancer Care Ontario. He is a person who is extremely well positioned to give us advice on what we need to do, and we welcome that advice.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Premier. During the pre-budget consultations, the London Chamber of Commerce said: "... our members were chiefly concerned about the size of the debt, the size of the deficit and the lack of an articulated plan to eliminate the deficit."

They have good reason to be concerned. At the rate you are on now, you will have doubled the debt by 2012-13. So I ask: What is your plan to address this structural deficit and massive debt that your government has created?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague will know that all Ontarians have a real concern with respect to the size of the deficit. I think all Ontarians understand, as well, that the deficit here in Ontario, like deficits elsewhere in much of the world, was created by our collective response to the recession and our decided effort to invest in economic stimulus to create jobs in the short term, and new roads, bridges and the like to enhance our productivity over the long term.

With respect to specifically how we're going to address that deficit, obviously that falls within the purview of the Minister of Finance's responsibilities, and he will be speaking to that later on when he presents a budget in the House, but obviously that is something we will come to grips with. It will take some time for us to eliminate this deficit—I don't think I'm revealing anything there—but we will do it in a way that is in keeping with the

values of Ontarians. They want us to get rid of the deficit, but they don't want us to compromise their public services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Premier, your budget track record is awful. In your past budgets, you set all kinds of benchmarks and targets, and you failed miserably at hitting them. Why should we believe this budget will be any better?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the things we are determined to do is take steps that will help us grow the Ontario economy. Ultimately, we don't create wealth in government. We recognize that and accept that.

It leads me to wonder why the honourable members opposite stand against the HST when they know that will lead to enhanced productivity and growth, and 600,000 more jobs; and why they stand against the cuts we are making to business taxes so businesses can further invest in productivity-enhancing technologies, new jobs and training for existing workers. It leads me to question why they are standing against so many of the initiatives we put in place that would strengthen this economy, that will grow the pie and that will enable us not only to create more jobs but to eliminate the deficit.

We on this side of the House know where we're coming from. We're determined to eliminate the deficit, maintain public services, grow this economy and create jobs for the people of Ontario.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France G  linas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. We understand that the McGuinty government is considering a patient payment plan that would see hospitals compete against each other for public money. Ontario families are concerned about any plan that could take important health services away from their community, bring inequity of access and pit rural and northern hospitals against urban ones or hospitals in wealthier neighbourhoods against those in poorer ones.

Will the Premier explain his plan and release the consulting report that it is based on?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member for the question. It's important to acknowledge that we have increased hospital funding year over year since we have been in office. Our track record is as strong as a record could be. Hospital funding is up by 42% over the past six years; this year alone by 4.7%.

We came to office from a Conservative government that was starving our health care system. We have been able to stabilize our health care system; we have been able to strengthen the foundation. Now, it is time to innovate. We need to make sure we are getting the very best value for the money we spend on health care.

Our wait times strategy has proven to be a tremendous success for the people of Ontario. Under our hospital wait times strategy, we've been able to bring wait times down substantially for people in this province and the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

1100

M^{me} France G  linas: I would say that the NDP has provided this government with many suggestions on how to eliminate the waste in health care. We have brought forward many suggestions as to how to keep people healthy and make sure that every health care dollar goes to care, not to consultants.

But there are reasons to be worried. Ontario wouldn't be the first to try this plan. The UK actually tried it in 2002, but scaled it back after a major study found that hospitals were manipulating the system to make more money. Another study showed that the cost of administering competitive bidding associated with the plan took a big bite out of the savings, if there were any.

Does the minister still think that this patient payment plan is still the best for Ontario? And what alternatives did you look at? Any of the ones we suggested?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me start by saying that I would welcome what those suggestions are. I have to say that I'm not aware of any suggestions that have come from the third party that would help us create the kind of health care system we need, not for our generation but for generations to come.

Our wait times strategy was built on the foundation of patient-based payments. What we have been able to see from that is that we've now gotten centres of excellence—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East and the Minister of the Environment, take it outside.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What we have seen through our wait times strategy is that we now have centres of excellence that are providing better care for people and specialized expertise. They can see more patients, and what that means is that wait times are shorter. People wait less for those important procedures.

We need to take that innovation. We need to take that success. We need to see that we'll have a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TOURISM

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Culture. Recently, headlines in the media have appeared suggesting that a hike in the United States passport fees could keep tourists away from Ontario and that new rules could hurt Ontario border cities. Whether you're a resident of a border community or not, it seems US passport fees will have a negative impact on tourism in Ontario. Communities across Ontario depend on tourism, especially those at or near border crossings, such as my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. We attract thousands of US visitors and, on average, the daily traffic at the Sault Ste. Marie International Bridge exceeds 7,000 vehicles.

There are challenges facing the tourism future in our community. What assurances can the minister make to

local businesses and tourism operators in cities like Sault Ste. Marie?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member from Sault Ste. Marie for the question. Yes, the global economy as well as the increase to US passport fees may present challenges, but we will emerge stronger and more competitive. Allow me to tell you why. It's because we are moving forward with the implementation of the 13 new tourism regions. This will help us better market Ontario communities. It will mean higher efficiency and better coordination. As well, we are also investing a total of \$65 million to support the industry. Our vision includes expanding into new markets that include Middle Eastern countries, China and India. At the same time, we remain focused on strengthening our domestic tourism.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. David Oraziatti: The cost of obtaining a passport in the US will increase from \$100 to \$135 for adults, and for children it will be increased from \$85 to \$100. A family of four would end up paying at least \$470 in passport fees. These increases will create further obstacles for tourism operators and local businesses and deter US visitors from Ontario. I need to assure residents in my riding that we're working together to reduce these challenges. We also need to ensure that we reach out to new markets and make strategic investments in communities across Ontario, so that we can attract more international visitors and continue to help support our domestic market. These steps need to be taken to ensure that tourism is strengthened in Sault Ste. Marie and across Ontario, as the global tourism market expands.

Minister, what steps will you undertake to ensure that communities like ours remain competitive in this market?

Hon. Michael Chan: Ontario has very important assets. We have an abundance of natural beauty, multi-cultural cities, welcoming towns and thriving cultural attractions. Communities such as Sault Ste. Marie add both vibrancy and beauty to Ontario. We invest nearly \$5 million each year to support the marketing of northern Ontario. Since 2007, we have also supported 46 festivals and events in the north through Celebrate Ontario.

Sault Ste. Marie needs to remain competitive in order for Ontario to remain competitive. This is why we are committed to working together to continue these investments and strengthen tourism in Sault Ste. Marie, in northern Ontario and across the province.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of Labour. The Minister of Health's assertion that genetic test samples are the reason for the 450% increase in Ontario patients headed to the United States is laughable. The labour minister would know this because according to a Metroland report on cross-border health care, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board is a big user of American health care. The health minister says she's try-

ing to repatriate Ontario patients getting American health care, but we now know that WSIB chair and former Liberal MPP Steve Mahoney is one of the Premier's US health care brokers.

Will the Minister of Labour acknowledge that his own bulk buying of health care in the US is making a mockery of his colleague the Minister of Health?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: As the member is fully aware, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board is an agency of the Ministry of Labour. That agency is funded by employer premiums across this province.

What that agency does is, when a worker is injured in the workplace, they receive treatment through that insurance, through the WSIB. We want to ensure that the WSIB is sustainable and that the WSIB is able to provide and assist with services and benefits to those injured workers. We will continue to work with the WSIB to ensure that they can do just that: provide services to those injured workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: This is proof again that Ontario families simply cannot trust what the Liberals say. Again, the health minister says genetic testing explains the 450% increase in Ontario patients billing OHIP for American health care. But the WSIB is not paying for genetic tests, and Metroland's investigative report reveals that patients, not tests, make up the bulk of cross-border care.

And it's not just the WSIB. In the past year, Ontario has become a bulk buyer of American health care, signing contracts making 40 US hospitals and clinics "preferred providers." Why would the Premier and his ministers say that they're trying to stem the tide of Ontario patients getting American health care when they are down in the States negotiating bulk discounts?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member again for the question and the opportunity to speak to all the benefits that the WSIB provides to injured workers.

When a worker is injured in the workplace, they need to know that they have an insurance provider, the WSIB, there for them to ensure that they have access to the services and supports they need. The WSIB does that in a very comprehensive way. They do that, also, in consultation with those that fund those programs. Those are employers, through premiums that are paid through work. They will continue to do that.

I know that the chair has been having his consultation with employers, with labour groups and with injured workers to see how we can even better yet provide services to those injured workers—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Is the government considering the elimination of the special diet allowance program?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This is a good question. Especially just before the budget, it's a good question.

The special diet has been in place for quite some time and has been modified through the years. It's no secret that we have been looking at this benefit to see if the benefit is reaching the goal that it was developed for, so I cannot speak more about it. We'll have to wait and see what will be in the budget or not.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?
1110

Mr. Michael Prue: I think the minister has already answered: It's going to be in the budget. A February 25 memo, circulated by directors of Ontario Works and ODSP, has fuelled the rumour—and now you've just compounded that—that this government will eliminate the special diet allowance program.

The McGuinty government has already slashed the program, arbitrarily excluding many medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis and lupus. Cutting the special diet allowance would be disastrous and runs counter to last week's Ontario Human Rights Tribunal ruling that special diets need more, not less, support.

Will the minister assure us there will be no cuts or major changes to the special diet in the upcoming budget, or is that exactly what you're going to do?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I cannot speak about what will be in the budget, but something that I can say is that this government is always looking at improving services for those who need our help. To say that this government has cut the special diet—I will correct the member by saying that, in 2003-04, the budget was around \$8 million, and today, the budget is over \$200 million, so this government has not cut anything.

SOCIAL WORKERS

TRAVAILLEURS SOCIAUX

Mr. Ted McMeekin: My question is also for the Minister of Community and Social Services. This week is National Social Work Week. I'm aware of the great work social workers do throughout our province as advocates of social policy and in assisting the most vulnerable, but I wonder if you'd take a couple of moments to inform this House why it's so important for us to recognize social workers in a week like this for the work they do throughout Ontario.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member for his question. I know that the member was, in his previous life, a social worker, so I wanted to acknowledge that. I want to take a moment, during National Social Work Week, to recognize the valuable work social workers do across the province.

This year, the theme is "Poverty: There Are Solutions—Social Workers Make a Difference."

Permettez-moi de vous dire que c'est un sujet que notre gouvernement a pris à cœur en annonçant la première stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté de l'Ontario, intitulée Rompre le cycle, et en adoptant la Loi de 2009 sur la réduction de la pauvreté, scellant pour toujours l'engagement à long terme de réduire la pauvreté en Ontario.

Addressing issues related to poverty is a priority for this government. We will increase the minimum wage to \$10.25 by 2010, a 33% increase. We've committed to full-day learning. We've provided—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I'm very happy to speak on behalf of my constituents in thanking all social workers throughout our province for their tireless and dedicated work. However, in order for social workers to be able to carry out the work they do, they need to have appropriate recognition for the unique skills they have.

Minister, can you bring us up to date on what's being done in Ontario to acknowledge that social workers do indeed bring a unique set of skills to assist those most in need in Ontario?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: We are listening to the concerns that the social work sector has raised. One particular issue is the use of the title "doctor."

D'ailleurs, notre gouvernement a écouté les représentants de la profession, qui nous avaient demandé que les travailleurs sociaux ayant un doctorat soient autorisés à utiliser le titre de « Docteur » dans le cadre de leur travail, et pas seulement dans le cadre du domaine de la santé. Depuis cet automne, c'est devenu chose possible.

Nous sommes à l'écoute des travailleurs sociaux. Nous considérons que c'est important d'encourager les travailleurs sociaux et de valoriser leur éducation. Les travailleurs sociaux ont un rôle essentiel dans notre société.

I want to thank social workers for their continued advocacy and urge all members of the Legislature to express appreciation for their work as we celebrate National Social Work Week.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. There has been a 450% increase in the number of Ontario patients travelling to the United States to get health care. Minister, what are you doing to assist patients with visas and passports, or is this something you leave up to Dalton McGuinty's US health brokers?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. As he well knows, the issues of immigration, visas and entry to the United States are federal government matters, but it does give me the opportunity to remind the member opposite what the government has done for newcomers and immigrants in Ontario. Since 2003, the McGuinty government has invested more than \$700 million in programs and services to help newcomers settle and get job-ready and licensed to work. That includes more than \$60 million a year for English-as-a-second-language training for more than 120,000 newcomers. We've invested—in this economy it's particularly important—more than \$145 million into almost 200 bridge training programs to help these same individuals find work in the Ontario economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I just want to point out to the House that Minister Hoskins wasn't even at Queen's Park very long before he was appointed to cabinet. He may not recall that one of his predecessors in his portfolio had a slush fund and doled out \$32 million to Liberal-friendly organizations. You may recall that. In fairness, he'd just got here when the auditor dropped the bombshell that Dalton McGuinty wasted \$1 billion in the eHealth scandal and has overspent tens of millions of dollars on assistive devices. But now he's at the cabinet table.

Minister Matthews says she wants to repatriate Ontario patients who are getting American health care in record numbers. Minister, what are you doing to recover the \$32 million that the former minister handed out to Liberal-friendly groups so it can be used to bring Ontario health care patients back home to Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I refer the supplementary to the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am absolutely committed to repatriating out-of-country procedures however we can do that. We've got a plan. We're bringing back bariatric surgery. We've got centres of excellence across this province that are now providing pre-care, the surgery itself and post-care. It's the right thing to do for patients. It's the right thing to do for the taxpayers of Ontario.

We're bringing back genetic testing. Over half of the out-of-country services that are provided by OHIP are genetic testing, and we're bringing that back to Ontario. We've got the people who can do it, and we're building the infrastructure so they can do it. It's the right thing to do, and we will continue to do it.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. The people of Six Nations are very concerned about health care services in their community. Last year, Six Nations' paramedic services were finally upgraded to advanced care, yet the Minister of Health is not allowing Six Nations EMS staff to administer procedures for which they are actually trained.

Can the minister explain why the paramedics working in Six Nations have a different scope of practice than in every other community in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I appreciate the question. In fact, this afternoon I am going to Six Nations to meet with Ava Hill to talk about this issue in particular. It is one that I care about. It is one that I am determined to find a resolution to. I am going there to hear from the people at Six Nations about this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Paramedics working in Six Nations are not permitted to administer a series of cardiac and airway interventions, interventions that could be life-saving, even though they are fully trained and can use their training in every other community in which they work. This government is setting health policies that have no logical explanation and that pose a threat to the health of the people of Six Nations.

When the minister visits Six Nations later on today, will she guarantee full EMS services on the Six Nations reserve by the people who are actually trained to provide those services, not only on Six Nations but in any other community in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's clear that the supplementary was written before she heard the answer.

I am going to Six Nations this afternoon. I am meeting with Ava Hill and other members of the Six Nations community to discuss this issue. I'm also very interested to hear directly from people at Six Nations about what else we need to do to improve the quality of the health of people who live at Six Nations. I think I speak for all of us when I say that there is real concern about the differential in health outcomes between those First Nations people and the rest of Ontarians. It's an area where we need to do better, and I look forward to my visit this afternoon.

1120

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Last year, the government passed the landmark Green Energy Act, a bold step that places Ontario at the forefront of the renewable energy industry and makes Ontario a hub of green energy investments.

The Green Energy Act was the pinnacle of our efforts to bring green energy and green jobs to Ontario. In 2003, there were only 15 megawatts of wind power being produced in Ontario; today, there are 1,100 megawatts of power.

This winter, the Premier and you, Minister, announced a historic agreement with a consortium led by Samsung. This consortium wants to invest right here in Ontario, thanks to our Green Energy Act. Minister, what will this investment mean to communities like mine across Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for the question. He's quite right: Samsung and the Korea Electric Power Corp. will be investing \$7 billion in our green economy here in Ontario. And what will that do? It'll create 16,000 jobs over six years. It'll bring with it four green manufacturing plants. It'll generate approximately 110 megawatt hours of emissions-free electricity over the lifespan of the contracts, enough power to supply every home in Ontario for three years. It also displaces a lot of CO₂—the equivalent of removing every car off Ontario roads for a full year.

All communities and all Ontarians are going to benefit from this investment. Many individual communities will see economic development opportunities open up as these feed-in tariffs are awarded, projects begin to take shape and manufacturing, servicing and construction needs develop.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: That is a significant investment in our province and one that certainly establishes us as a leader in the green energy field.

Minister, many companies are looking at Ontario as a destination of choice for renewable energy investments thanks to the feed-in tariff program included in the Green Energy Act. There is clearly a great desire to invest in renewable projects in Ontario, from domestic to foreign companies alike.

With so much discussion around the feed-in tariff program and the interest in garnering the investment, could the minister please provide an explanation of what this all means?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Absolutely. I think President Obama said it best when he said that the nation that leads the clean energy economy will be the nation that leads the global economy. I think he's right.

I think Ontarians are getting excited about the fact that Ontario is way out in front. This investment creates jobs, it kick-starts our green energy economy, it provides 2,500 megawatts of green power for Ontario's energy supply and it also contributes to Ontario's ability to build local expertise and manufacturing capability that could open up an exciting opportunity south of the border.

We've developed the most comprehensive feed-in tariff in North America. It's gaining attention across the world; it's seen as best in class. We've received over 2,000 applications for contracts, and the Ontario Power Authority will be offering these contracts up very, very soon.

The feed-in tariff is designed to spark development of renewable energy and spur this new green economy, and that's exactly what it's doing.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, we've heard today that there has been a 450% increase in Ontario patients driving to the United States for health care. Given that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has no plans to help Ontarians with their passports, will you be expanding the enhanced driver's licence to include the OHIP card, too?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm just trying to wrap my mind around the extent to which this is a transportation question.

What I will say is that we have an enhanced driver's licence in place and we have provided opportunities for people who are looking for that mechanism to enable them to cross into the United States.

But I think underlying the question is really a health question, and I will refer the supplementary to my colleague—the issue being that we are doing everything we can to repatriate services to Ontario. I think the member opposite heard that.

In my ministry, what we want to do is to facilitate people coming from the United States to Canada. We need that kind of exchange as well—

Interjection: For tourism and everything.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —for our tourism and for our businesses. So we're going to continue to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: The Minister of Health's assertion is that genetic test samples are the reason for the 450% increase in traffic that's headed to the United States clinics, and I really think that's laughable, because I think people are going there too. But whether it's patients travelling for their procedures or couriers dropping off tests, that is still a lot more traffic on the 400-series highways.

The health minister said moments ago that she's interested in adding infrastructure to address the Ontario patients getting American care. Do you have any plans to expand the HOV lanes to accommodate the rapid growth of numbers of Ontario patients who have to travel—have to travel—to the United States for health care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have to say, I have missed the questions from the member from Burlington. She was my critic when I was Minister of Education.

We're doing a number of things to improve the flow of traffic on our roads. We are investing in public transportation. We are investing in the building and rebuilding of our roads. We are increasing the number of HOV lanes on our highways in Ontario.

We understand how important it is to help people and goods move around this province. We are working on a project in Windsor to improve the flow of traffic through the Windsor corridor and across the border.

On a number of fronts, there are things that we are doing to assist the movement of people and goods in this province—investing billions of dollars in transit and in highway and bridge reconstruction.

HEALTHY EATING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Promotion de la santé, the Minister of Health Promotion.

This afternoon, the House will prorogue and Bill 156, the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act, will die. In spite of the fact that we are looking for savings and there is \$2 million at stake annually for the health care system in Ontario, and in spite of the growing epidemic of childhood obesity, this government has chosen to sit on their hands rather than allow a proactive, important public health bill to move forward.

Can the minister explain why she has chosen to allow this bill to die on the order paper?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I wish to tell this Legislature that the government of Ontario is certainly very committed to the health of Ontarians, and we are in fact committed to creating a healthier Ontario.

We have developed a very strong foundation for healthier families by promoting good food choices, addressing childhood obesity and promoting physical activity. To help Ontarians achieve healthier lives, we're also supporting healthy eating through the Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act. As well, we announced new nutrition standards for food and beverages that are sold in schools.

We established the EatRight Ontario service, which provides nutrition information and advice on healthy eating. We have a registered dietitian who is available to talk to Ontarians about healthy food choices.

We are also providing funding for Eat Smart—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want you to know that there are now two dozen—count them, 24—American states and municipalities that have passed the exact same legislation. They realize that point-of-purchase calorie labelling is an important step in healthy eating, in healthy populations, and saves health care dollars.

Heart and stroke foundations have called trans fats the new tobacco, and Bill 156 would take artificial trans fats out of our food.

Ontario had a real opportunity to be a public health leader, but it chose to pander to industry pressure instead.

So I ask: Can Ontarians expect a focus on health promotion and disease prevention and a focus on keeping people healthy, to save health care dollars, in the coming session of the Legislature?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I have to say welcome to the young people—and they're leaving—who are in the gallery today. Our government certainly is committed to the young people in this province and the health of the young people in this province.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Thank you. Yes, we are. We have a number of programs in the school system and outside of the school system that are raising awareness and also educating young people about how important it is for them to eat healthy and to remain physically active.

1130

As a matter of fact, our athletes, who have done tremendously well in Ontario and in the Olympic Games recently, are funded through our government in the province of Ontario. We saw how spectacularly they did in the Olympics, and they are great role models for our young people in this province. We expect that we will continue to see improvement as we move forward.

There's always more to be done, but we continue to maintain and provide for the children of this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SPORTS FUNDING

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is also for the Minister of Health Promotion.

Minister, all Canadians were treated to a spectacular Olympic Games in Vancouver. Despite personal struggles—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just stop the clock. The member from Hamilton East will please come to order.

Please continue.

Mr. Charles Sousa: As I was saying, Minister, Canadians were treated to a spectacular Olympic Games in Vancouver. Despite personal struggles and strong opposition, our athletes had the third-highest medal count of the games and the most gold medals ever earned by a single country at the Winter Olympics.

The people of the great riding of Mississauga South are proud of our own Jennifer Botterill, who made Mississauga proud as she and her teammates on Canada's women's hockey team won gold.

Minister, what does the government do to support athletes like Jennifer as they train and prepare to represent Canada at the Olympic Games?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member from Mississauga South for his question. I'm sure he's indeed a proud supporter of Jennifer and of all our athletes, who did tremendously well at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Our government continues support for amateur athletes at all levels and we continue to encourage all Ontarians to live by the example of all our Olympians and athletes to lead healthier, more active lives.

Jennifer and 32 other Ontario athletes competed at the Vancouver Winter Olympics with the benefit of support from our government's \$10-million annual Quest for Gold program. This program funds our high-performance athletes.

I must tell you, I get many letters and cards. As a matter of fact, I have a card here that I received from Jennifer in which she sent me her picture. It says, "Thank you for your wonderful support. The Quest for Gold program and funding has helped me tremendously. It's been an important part of my journey."

We're very excited for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Minister, since the games began, and especially now that they have concluded, many have raised concerns that governments across Canada may reduce their support for our athletes.

As we all know, funding is crucial for our athletes' success. Minister, how will our ministry support our high-performance athletes after the conclusion of the 2010 Paralympic Games?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Again, I just want to continue and show a picture of Jennifer Botterill, and this is for her, hockey, and hockey gold.

Out of the 26 medals that we won at the Winter Olympics, seven were won by Quest for Gold athletes. That is 27% of the nation's total medal haul. Of the 14 event gold medals won by Canada, four were won by Quest for Gold athletes, and we are very proud of all of them. I'm confident that all of you across there share the pride we have in our Olympians and our athletes.

We are so proud, and we're looking forward to hosting the best Pan American Games ever. We're also looking forward to the Paralympic Games that are coming up this month as well. We fund 13 of the 14 hockey players on the Paralympic teams. As a result of the 2015 games, we can look forward to upwards of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, I've met with farmers, outdoor enthusiasts and livestock evaluators, and I'd hope you're aware of the explosion in the coyote population in Ontario and the imbalance that it's causing, especially as a result of what has taken place recently in Pickering.

Last night, I spoke with Councillor O'Connell from Pickering. They have put forward a bylaw shutting down hunting in Pickering, specifically. The concern is that the reason they're moving forward is because, according to Councillor O'Connell, the Ministry of Natural Resources is refusing to enforce the fish and game act in Pickering. As a result of that, they're moving forward with a bylaw to completely shut down the hunting that could effectively alleviate some of the coyote problems.

Minister, can you confirm or deny what is actually taking place with enforcement of the fish and game act in Pickering with the ministry?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I appreciate the question. This is a very important issue. Certainly some communities in southern Ontario have been experiencing problems with coyotes, and they have been dealing with my Ministry of Natural Resources staff. We've been working with many municipalities, and certainly we would be happy to work with your municipality to resolve any issues that you're experiencing with the coyote population.

Public safety is a number one issue for our ministry, and we'd be happy to work with your community to alleviate the problems.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like all members to join me as we take this opportunity to say thank you to this great group of pages for the wonderful work they have done on our behalf. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Applause.

DEFERRED VOTES

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act / Projet de loi 236, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1136 to 1141.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members, please take your seats.

Mr. Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arnott, Ted
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Caplan, David
Colle, Mike
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Dunlop, Garfield
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John

Gélinas, France
Hardeman, Ernie
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Johnson, Rick
Jones, Sylvia
Kormos, Peter
Kular, Kuldeep
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Marchese, Rosario
Martiniuk, Gerry
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza

Munro, Julia
Oraziotti, David
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Prue, Michael
Pupatello, Sandra
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Savoline, Joyce
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhir, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Opposed?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 68; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Government House leader.

Mr. Peter Kormos: No—it goes to committee.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: The member for Welland has a better suggestion, but I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): So ordered.

ENERGY CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉNERGIE

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 235, An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010 and to amend other Acts / Projet de loi 235, Loi édictant la Loi de 2010 sur la protection des consommateurs d'énergie et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Same vote? Agreed? Agreed.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 68; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'd ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): So ordered.

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters / Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1146 to 1147.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Caplan, David
Colle, Mike
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic

Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gélinas, France
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Johnson, Rick
Kormos, Peter
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Marchese, Rosario

Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza
Oraziotti, David
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Prue, Michael
Pupatello, Sandra
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.

Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Paul

Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Dunlop, Garfield
Hardeman, Ernie
Jones, Sylvia

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
Ouellette, Jerry J.

Savoline, Joyce
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 57; the nays are 11.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): So ordered.

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a copy of an order in council appointing the following members as commissioners of the Board of Internal Economy: the Speaker, who shall be Chair; the Honourable Christopher Bentley; the Honourable Brad Duguid; the Honourable Monique Smith; Wayne Arthurs, MPP; Elizabeth Witmer, MPP; and Gilles Bisson, MPP.

PROROGATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has issued a proclamation proroguing the Legislative Assembly as of 12:30 p.m. today. The Lieutenant Governor has also issued a proclamation convening a new session of the Legislative Assembly at 2 p.m. next Monday, March 8, 2010.

This House is adjourned.

The House adjourned at 1150.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
		Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Hon. / L'hon. Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Murray, Glen R (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	
Vacant	Leeds–Grenville	
Vacant	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Robert Bailey
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Jim Brownell, Kim Craiton
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Khalil Ramal
Clerks / Greffiers: William Short (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

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Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Eric Hoskins, Pat Hoy
Norm Miller, Charles Sousa
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Helena Jaczek
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Amrit Mangat, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, Reza Moridi
David Orazietti, Joyce Savoline
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Rick Johnson, Lisa MacLeod
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Jim Wilson
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Jeff Leal, Dave Levac
Leeanna Pendergast, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Khalil Ramal
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Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Michael Prue
Khalil Ramal
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

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des comptes publics**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Shurman
France Gélinas, Phil McNeely
Jerry J. Ouellette, David Ramsay
Liz Sandals, Peter Shurman
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craiton, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Sophia Aggelonitis, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Linda Jeffrey
Sylvia Jones, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Carol Mitchell, Shafiq Qaadri
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

Chair / Président: Vacant

Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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